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Oral history interview with Rosamund Felsen, 2004 Oct. 10-11

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Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Rosamund Felsen on October 10-11, 2004. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Anne Ayres for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Rosamund Felsen and Anne Ayres have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MS. ANNE AYRES: The interview is with Rosamund Felsen, founder of the Rosamund Felsen Gallery. The interviewer is Anne Ayres. The interview takes place at Rosamund Felsen's home in the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles. The date is Sunday, October 10th, 2004.

Rosamund, let's not start at the beginning; let's start now. I read recently that Duchamp commented, when attending his first-ever retrospective – which, as you know, happened at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963 – that, quote, "Life begins at 70." He said, "This show is fun. It gives me a wonderful feeling."

I've always had the feeling that you get a lot of fun out of life. You were born in 1934 in Pasadena. Do you still have the large enthusiasms when you show up at your gallery in Bergamot Station every Tuesday through Saturday?

MS. ROSAMUND FELSEN: I do, amazingly enough. It's always an exciting new day. You never know what's going to happen. You never know who's going to come walking through the door. For example, yesterday who came walking through the door but Tom Hanks. [Laughs.] So, you never have a clue as to what's going to happen, how people are going to respond to the art, which, of course, is our first and foremost concern. But probably the most exciting thing is the day that we install a new show. And after 26 years, it has never lost its excitement for me.

MS. AYRES: The general focus of your gallery was on Los Angeles artists, and often on artists who weren't getting that much attention. You seem to have wanted your gallery to be the place where out-of-towners came to see the newest and best of L.A. artists. Did that work out? And was that function more urgent when you started your gallery in 1978 than it is today?

MS. FELSEN: It was the exception rather than the rule in 1978. In the early days, the collectors and museum people were most comfortable with the artists with whom they had the most familiarity, the Ed Ruschas and the – I can't say John Baldessari because he wasn't a popular artist in 1978 – but a lot of the artists from the Venice area: Billy Al Bengston and Robert Graham and those artists. Those were the ones that people were comfortable with. And in those days, the habit of Los Angeles collectors when they were going to buy some art was to go to New York. And it was before the shift. Where today people are most interested in finding the newest and the youngest artists. In those days it was the exception, I'd say.

MS. AYRES: Of course, if you are committed to developing an artist's career over time, as you are, it is inevitable that your stable of artists will age along with you. I see most of your artists as quite established, mid-career at least; however, you have added younger artists. What younger artists have you added recently?

MS. FELSEN: Well, the most recent is an artist we are going to be showing for the first time next week. And his name is Andrew Falkowski. He is a recent graduate from Cal Arts, last year, and a very intelligent artist who paints with great thought and executes his work very beautifully. It's a combination that's kind of rare with new, young artists. And there has already been considerable interest in the work. We have already sold a couple of his paintings even before the show was installed. So that's exciting.

MS. AYRES: For some time now there has been ACME, Marc Foxx, Richard Telles, Susan Vielmetter, the various and shifting galleries of Chinatown for those looking for the best of the newest. Do you feel that this new generation of dealers has proven itself for the long haul? And does their focus differ from yours?

MS. FELSEN: It's too soon to tell. As you already mentioned, I do continue to work with these artists into their period of midcareer. We don't know yet whether these galleries will be continuing to work with them. Right now their focus seems to be on the newest.

MS. AYRES: I think that's probably true of the Chinatown galleries that are brave outposts and come and go and provide interesting opportunities for new graduates to dip into the process of exhibiting for the public, but would you think that ACME has certainly proven itself by now?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, I think it's proven itself. I don't know that anyone would qualify as a midcareer artist. I can't think of anybody. I still think of their stable of artists as being young. But I think that they are definitely here to stay and they're doing a very fine job, and I'm sure that they will continue working with them.

MS. AYRES: Well, has there ever been a satisfactory definition of a midcareer artist? [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: Oh, gosh, I don't know. At least over 40, probably.

MS. AYRES: Probably. I'm old enough to remember when a 42-year-old artist was considered a young artist.

MS. FELSEN: You mean like – because Barnett Newman had his first exhibition at age 50.

MS. AYRES: That's right. That's right. Things have changed that way.

Whom among your gallerist colleagues of your own generation do you admire most, and why?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, that's a tough question. I'll have to answer that later. I'll have to give that some thought.

MS. AYRES: Maybe it will develop through our conversation.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. AYRES: I think we need to go into a little background because it's useful for the Archives of American Art, but I'm wondering how much detail we want to go into. I want to credit a 1995 UCLA oral history interview which put a great deal on record.

For instance, your parents were Romanian Jews who settled first in Canada, then in Pasadena. You were the much youngest of three children and were born in Pasadena, California, on February 28th, 1934. There was little art museum background, except for the Huntington Library and Gardens, but you do remember interest in popular magazine articles on Duchamp, Dali, Pollock.

Were there particular childhood experiences that helped form a character drawn to facilitating the careers of artists? For instance, you characterized yourself as, quote, "insecure but egocentric at the same time." What are the advantages and disadvantages of that combination?

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] I don't even remember saying that. It's probably true.

MS. AYRES: I think that's probably true of many of us. [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] How insightful!

Well, I think the willingness to recognize that you have made mistakes, and if you're veering off in what you decide is not a good direction, you're able to shift and go in another direction. And so I think that comes with confidence, I think. And the willingness to – the lack of fear of making a mistake, I think, is what allows me to go ahead and do the kinds of things that I want to do.

MS. AYRES: Do you feel that confidence involved in not being afraid of making a mistake must have been inculcated early in life? I'm looking for kind of childhood ways of being with your parents and with your siblings and in your home that might have, looking back, given you a clue that you would be a good facilitator of artists or something like that.

MS. FELSEN: I don't think that happened early on. I wasn't thinking in those terms. I think I learned this as an adult. Also, my experiences at Gemini [Gemini GEL: Graphics Editions Limited] in working with really top-rate artists and learning about the creative process better and learning what it's like to be a creative person. Early on, I never thought that I would end up in the art world. I always thought I would be in theater, but not as a performer in any way. I always thought I would be like a director or producer or something like that, which is interesting because that translates so perfectly into becoming an art dealer.

MS. AYRES: I think that's what I'm getting at, that there were certain interests or temperamental ways of being in the world that we pick up or learn when we're young, and then looking back on them years later, we kind of pinpoint that as – you could have been many other things, but what happened in your childhood is useful. It isn't surprising that you ended up the way you did, given the kind of upbringing you had. Do you think that's true, or was it a real break?

MS. FELSEN: Well, I think I was always discerning in terms of music. It was always clear to me what I felt was good music. I had a critical ear. I had probably what you would refer today as good taste because of movies; I don't remember seeing any plays of any substantial quality when I was young – but I think I was always fairly

critical and I was able to develop good taste somehow. I don't know where that came from, honestly.

MS. AYRES: Your education took place in the Pasadena School District and at Pasadena City College and Los Angeles City College. Were you very social or did you tend to be a loner?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, no, I was social. I had about three or four different groups of friends that were totally unrelated to one another.

MS. AYRES: Being social is not unconnected to one's success as a dealer, I would think.

MS. FELSEN: Right. This is true. This is true.

MS. AYRES: Do you know any dealers who are loners?

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] It would not be successful.

MS. AYRES: I don't think so.

Do you think that your parents were generally satisfied with their lives? What were their ambitions for themselves and for their children?

MS. FELSEN: I think that they were happy. And I think that my father in later years became successful in business, and he and my mother lived a comfortable life and they were comfortable with their children. Probably they weren't so happy with my choice of husband – my first choice, of course. The second one they liked.

MS. AYRES: There have been at least two times in your life when you considered pursuing a degree at UCLA and did not. The first time was in 1952, when you got married instead. The '50s were for you primarily a time of raising your three children. Would you talk a little bit about that period of your life? You were very young.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, I was. I was married at 18. I had one child at the age of 19, had three children by the time I was 23. And a good portion of my time was spent with the education of my first son, who was born deaf and he had to go to a special school, the John Tracy Clinic for preschool-aged children, and that took an enormous amount of time. And then he went to special schools after that. And all my time was spent with raising the small children.

MS. AYRES: And for the record, your husband's name was?

MS. FELSEN: Verne Hinderer.

MS. AYRES: And the divorce was in 1959. The marriage ended in 1959.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: And then you married Sidney Felsen in 1960 and had your fourth child. You must have been really busy at home. Did you ever question your satisfaction? Did you think about working outside the home once the kids grew older? We're talking about the first half of the '60s, when you were still in your '20s, and before Gemini.

MS. FELSEN: No. I mean, how could I possibly think about working outside? No. I don't think I even thought about that. It just didn't cross my mind. It didn't seem it would be possible.

MS. AYRES: I think I'm asking that question because the same is to some degree true with me. And I find when younger women talk to me about that period, they have a kind of glamorous idea about early "women's liberation" and the books we were reading and the things we were doing and the marches we were planning on and so forth. So I just thought it might be useful to suggest that certain things just never entered our minds at a certain point.

MS. FELSEN: Right. Right.

MS. AYRES: You agree with that?

MS. FELSEN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Did you get the sort of help from your husband that, oh, young married women expect today?

MS. FELSEN: No. I just assumed that I would do everything and run the household, take care of all the children, and I did it. And I didn't even ask for any help, because I didn't need it, so I thought.

MS. AYRES: Yes. Right. [Laughs.]

The ‘50s and early ‘60s were a period when Los Angeles was still beginning to come into its own as an art center of potential great interest. How aware were you – I’m still talking before Gemini, let’s say. How aware were you of say, Ferus Gallery or Rauschenberg’s exhibition of “Combines” at the Virginia Dwan Gallery in 1962; or the early exhibitions of Walter Hopps at the Pasadena Art Museum before the move; and the move in 1965 of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to its own new building? I’m talking about the period before Gemini GEL and your own involvement with the Pasadena Art Museum.

MS. FELSEN: Well, as it happens, my second husband, Sidney Felsen, had some involvement with the art community in Los Angeles. He was at that time a practicing CPA, and some of his clients were artists. And he also was very close friends with Stanley and Elyse Grinstein, who were even more involved with the Los Angeles art community, and they were at that point already starting to become serious art collectors. So through that connection we started attending gallery openings and the Monday night La Cienega Gallery Walks and going to museum openings. And yes, I do remember when the museum opened, and I remember the early exhibitions at the Pasadena Art Museum. And so that probably began right after we were married in the end of 1960.

MS. AYRES: There must be many people who were in your situation to some degree, just as there are today, who involve themselves with the cultural world of their community to some extent without ever thinking of being an active participant in it. I think that must have been the change for you, between being an amateur, a lover, a participator, and actually engaging.

MS. FELSEN: Right. And it also happened to coincide with the fact that my children, the youngest was just starting school and the others, of course, were all in school, and I had more time now. And so the timing on this, everything kind of dovetailed right into place.

MS. AYRES: Yeah. Timing and historical contingency.

MS. FELSEN: Timing is everything.

MS. AYRES: Is everything.

Maurice Tuchman organized an exhibition at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] in 1965 called “New York School, the First Generation: Paintings of the 1940s and ‘50s.”

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm.

MS. AYRES: Did this exhibition seem like an introduction or summing up? This is a three-part question. The next year, there was a Man Ray retrospective at LACMA. Were you aware of the change from the high seriousness of the New York School painting to the wit and irony of Pop Art and what was then called Neo-Dada?

MS. FELSEN: Yes, because at this point I thought, well – oh, early on, as soon as we started going to museums and galleries and so forth, we were already subscribing to art magazines, *ArtForum*. KCET was having television interviews with artists. In fact, one of them I remember distinctly was Alan Solomon interviewing Jasper Johns, and I thought he was the most brilliant person I had ever heard in my life, in the art world anyway. And I thought, oh, this is just fantastic. I was just absolutely glued to this, to everything that he had to say.

Now mind you, I had never been to New York by 1965 either, so I had only seen this artwork in reproduction, and so to see these in person, this was a very exciting thing for me. And the scale, I remember that was a big thing for me, the scale, seeing these great big huge things.

MS. AYRES: And you caught a real change in the weather between, say, the New York School painting and Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. It was just clear to you that something different was going on.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, this is the real thing here. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: And I’m sure you saw the Man Ray exhibition. So you began to get a sense of an historical – not exactly a precedent, but at least a current that was –

MS. FELSEN: Well, the thing about the Man Ray, that was after Gemini had already begun, and we invited Man Ray to come and do a project at Gemini. And so I got to know Man Ray and his wife Juliette quite well, so that was quite fun.

MS. AYRES: I brought with me a catalogue of Maurice Tuchman’s exhibition “Art in Los Angeles: Seventeen Artists in the Sixties,” which opened at LACMA in 1981. It has a wonderful pictorial timeline from 1960 to 1970 at the back. Would you just leaf through it to see if any of the events jog your memory? I’ll turn the recorder off for a minute.

MS. FELSEN: Let's see.

[Audio break.]

MS. AYRES: We are recording again.

My question is: Looking back at a history that is sorted out and organized by someone else is not the same thing as living through that time; what events stand out in your mind?

MS. FELSEN: Well, I'm just reminded – looking at this photograph in the catalogue here of the "Four Abstract Classicists" artists, Karl Benjamin, Lorser Feitelson, Frederick Hammersley and John McLaughlin – my brother and I used to regularly watch the Lorser Feitelson television show. I think it was on Sunday mornings. And it was interesting that it was so important to me to watch that. And I thought he was so elegant, and he talked, giving us so much information that we had no access to otherwise. And that was an important thing. That was in the '50s.

[The following reflections refer to paging through the catalogue.]

After that – [turning the page] – I didn't remember a Josef Albers show at Ferus. I remember being at – I can't remember what exhibition it was at the Pasadena Art Museum, and seeing Louise Nevelson wearing a full-length sable coat – [giggles] – and with that dark, dark eye shadow that she used to wear.

MS. AYRES: And lashes.

MS. FELSEN: And those false eyelashes that she used to wear. Incredible.

[Continuing to look through the catalogue.]

I remember George Rickey was an important artist in a lot of Los Angeles collections, and to me, I just thought it was just kind of entertainment art. I just never took it very seriously.

MS. AYRES: You and I have had that conversation, I think, about kinetic art in general. I've softened a little bit, but not completely.

MS. FELSEN: Well, maybe you have, but I haven't. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: That's on record, then.

MS. FELSEN: [Laughing.] Oh, and the early Dwan Gallery. Those were important exhibitions. And I certainly remember the Rauschenberg and many other shows that she had. Over the years there were many galleries from New York that tried to open in Los Angeles, and Virginia Dwan was probably the most successful. I know the Pace [Pace Wildenstein, New York, New York] tried it, a couple of times they tried it, in the '60s and then again – no, the '70s they tried it again, and then again in the '90s.

But I think it takes a connection, and it's difficult for people who aren't familiar with Los Angeles to make that connection, I think. I think it really requires somebody who has familiarity with the city because it's so spread out. When you walk out a door in New York onto the street, you're going to be connecting with people, and you don't have that in Los Angeles. And I think that that's something that they don't understand until they actually live here and know that there are different ways of making connections. You don't just drop in on somebody, you have to make a telephone call and make sure that they're there because of the distances necessary to travel. So it's about learning how to negotiate, I think, in a different city.

This group photograph here of the artists from Ferus. And the one that I always get nostalgic about is John Altoon, who I got to know pretty well. And I was so sorry that he died so young. He was a wonderful artist.

MS. AYRES: With your second husband, Sidney Felsen, you were a co-founder in 1966 of Gemini GEL. I believe that Stanley and Elyse Grinstein were also involved, as you said. How did that come about? Who was the master printer?

MS. FELSEN: The master printer was Ken Tyler, who had previously been a master printer at the nonprofit print shop Tamarind that was based here in Los Angeles, funded by the Ford Foundation. And June –

MS. AYRES: Wayne.

MS. FISHER: – Wayne, thank you – June Wayne was the director. So Ken Tyler had been there for a number of years and decided to go out on his own. And so he started this custom lithography shop, and artists would come to him and he would make prints for them. But he realized that financially this was not a good way to go.

And at that time he was sharing space with the framing establishment Art Services, on Melrose, and he was in the back and Art Services was on the front, toward the side. And so I think what happened is that Stanley and Elyse Grinstein had been at Art Services and they were introduced to Ken Tyler, and he was obviously looking for some kind of backing. And they discussed it with Sidney and myself, Stanley and Elyse did.

And the idea presented itself because I had talked with Sid about the fact that he had so much interest in art, and I thought how can he be content with just working as a CPA? And I thought there ought to be something more interesting that he ought to do. And so he started thinking about that, because he'd always thought that he provided a valuable service, and I said I was sure that you did, but there's more. And so he started thinking about different things.

And so this presented itself. And so the four of us got together and started thinking about ways to make something lucrative out of this print shop.

So the determination was that the print publishing business, to be done correctly and successfully, it can only be done if you're working with the top-rate artists who have an established market, and that would enable the business to succeed. And the idea of working with these top-rate artists is that they already have representation by mostly New York, very established galleries, and also there are other galleries around the country who represent these artists as well. So there was already a built-in network of dealers, and this would be the logical way to do this.

So it was decided that we would talk with Ken Tyler about this and his wife at that time, Kay Tyler, and it was agreed that we would go ahead and do this. And so the business was begun January 1st of 1966.

And Ken had already worked at Tamarind with Josef Albers, and so that seemed like a logical place to begin. And at this time Josef was getting elderly and no longer was willing to travel to Los Angeles. So what he did was, he knew he wanted to make a series of white-line squares, and so he painted on board how he wanted the prints to be, and he cut each of them in half. And he kept one half, sent the other half to Gemini, and Gemini would have to match the colors perfectly in lithography ink to his paint. No easy task.

And this whole process – there were 17 in the series, editions of 125, as I recall – and this whole process took nine months, which is kind of unbelievable that it took that long, but it was a fledgling, beginning place. There were printers who came from – at that time Cal State Long Beach had a good printmaking department in their Art Department – and so printers came from there. And so that was the beginning. And then the next artist who was approached was Bob Rauschenberg, who was always interested in –

[Audio break.]

MS. AYRES: Hi, Rosamund. We were changing tapes or discs, you were talking about Bob Rauschenberg, I think, and coming out to work with Gemini and with Ken Tyler.

MS. FELSEN: So Bob Rauschenberg came out and he came with a friend. I think he needed a buffer zone at that time. And that was really thrilling. Bob, of course, is always interested in doing something new and innovative, and anybody who would present him with an idea of something that he had never done before, that was the most interesting thing. And what had been suggested to him was that he could do the biggest lithograph that he had ever done. And what it ended up being was his self-portrait, but the self-portrait was an x-ray, a life-size x-ray of himself. And this print was called *Booster*, and it's been a very important – art historically important – print.

It just happened that we were able to do this because – well, Ken figured out how to do it technically, and then the x-ray was done by the husband of an old high school friend of Sid's who was a radiologist, and so it was all, you know, in the family, so to speak. So that's how that came about.

But once Bob came to Gemini, that kind of opened the door for all the other artists to come and it wasn't difficult to get other artists. And it was a success from the very beginning.

MS. AYRES: I think you probably answered this question by implication, but I wanted to ask you to compare Gemini GEL with the Tamarind Lithography Workshop that was founded by the L.A. artist June Wayne in 1960. Her operation was nonprofit, which is, I suppose, the huge difference in the operation, but primarily how were they similar and different? Totally different, I would imagine, in –

MS. FELSEN: Well, yes, it was by invitation at Gemini, and the idea was that no expense would be spared. Whatever the artist wanted to do, no matter how difficult it seemed, Gemini would do it. And I suspect, although I don't know for certain, that Tamarind probably had its financial limitations and was therefore prohibited from doing certain things. But we were very adventurous. And this was, of course, you know, the heyday of Pop Art and the excitement about the New York art scene and everything that was new and exciting. Everything had to

be bigger and better and flashier and more exciting, and this was how Gemini just –

MS. AYRES: Yeah, and because of Pop Art's interest in replication and media imagery, the whole idea of reproduction was in the air, I think.

MS. FELSEN: It made perfect sense, yeah.

MS. AYRES: Just as photography became recognized as a legitimate art form, it probably gave a boost to the world of printmaking.

MS. FELSEN: Absolutely. Yes.

And also the economics of it was that here were these very important artists who had gotten very famous very quickly, and there was a lot of excitement about beginning to collect, and many people were not able to buy paintings and sculpture by these particular artists, so prints, being multiples, enabled them to be able to afford to get works by these artists. Johns and Rauschenberg were very, very – I mean, they weren't just making reproductions of their paintings, they were making original works for these lithographic series, and they were very, very innovative in their techniques. So that was important.

MS. AYRES: So perhaps unlike the first experience with Albers, you tended to want to work with well-known artists who were interested in exploring the experimental aspects of printmaking.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: How were the presses different in these two workshops? I believe it was your father who helped build Gemini a bigger press.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Was that in relationship to the Rauschenberg prints?

MS. FELSEN: No, that came later. Actually, the Rauschenberg print actually had to be done on two separate stones because there wasn't a big enough press to do it, and Ken had figured out how to do that. But the next Rauschenberg series – well, there were two series after that, one called "Stoned Moon," which had to do with the moon shot in 1969. And Bob Rauschenberg had been invited to go to see the take-off, blast-off, whatever you call it – I've forgotten the terminology. He had been invited to at that time it was called Cape Kennedy. And so he was very inspired by this and he wanted to do some really big prints. So my father and his engineer designed a press and built it so that they would be able to do these great big huge prints.

MS. AYRES: Remind us what business your father was in at that time.

MS. FELSEN: He had a machine shop where they did subcontracting for government contracts, mostly the Navy, and this was during the Vietnam War.

MS. AYRES: Was he thrilled to be involved with his daughter's –

MS. FELSEN: Absolutely thrilled, yeah. Really, really thrilled. And when we had an exhibition of Gemini's work at the Museum of Modern Art, he and my mom came, and he was very, very excited to be involved in this.

MS. AYRES: What exactly was your role at Gemini GEL? And I know you've covered this in other interviews, so I'm sure you can kind of sum it up.

MS. FELSEN: I started out as being the shipping clerk, and I was taught how to pack prints very carefully and ship them off. And then I worked into becoming like the assistant curator. At Gemini that means really more of a registrar, probably – but overseeing the artist signing the prints and then cataloguing them and caring for the prints, and also involved with sales to a certain point.

MS. AYRES: How much were you involved with sales?

MS. FELSEN: Very little, because I was more interested in the creative part and working with the artists and doing that kind of thing. I didn't feel that that was a strength of mine, working in sales. And I had to learn gallery social skills later.

MS. AYRES: Yeah, I wanted to pursue that a little bit because I know from some of my own experience with, say, nonprofit institutions that one of the things that is enjoyed least is to be involved in so-called "selling." Do you feel that this is an unnecessary distinction in terms of dealing with art today? I haven't posed that very clearly, but – [audio break]. I think I was trying to pose a question about the nuts and bolts – oh, that's the wrong word

too – about the joy and thrill that comes out of selling. And you felt that you had to develop that later in life and that you didn't have it when you were working at Gemini.

MS. FELSEN: No, because to me, I'd much rather work with the artists. I didn't want to have to deal with people that I didn't know or didn't know very well. And some of this is about taking yourself out of yourself and working with another person and thinking about how they might be feeling about things. And you always have to be trying to get things out of them rather than just thinking about yourself. And I think I wasn't ready to do that, and since I wasn't needed to do that, it was not an issue.

MS. AYRES: And I think too there's just a difference in the climate of the times. It may be an apocryphal story, but I remember reading that Stieglitz, for instance, would sometimes refuse to sell a work by, say, Arthur Dove to someone because they weren't right for the painting, and that his artists were – at least they put up with this, if they weren't appreciative of it.

MS. FELSEN: Well, that's because Stieglitz was rich and he didn't have to make a sale. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Yeah, as opposed to Arthur Dove, who needed to make that sale.

MS. FELSEN: Right!

MS. AYRES: I think there was probably, given the times, a built-in feeling of distaste with the market and with selling that has changed considerably.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, it has, I think that's true.

MS. AYRES: To be a facilitator of the creative process is a very nuanced and sensitive position. What natural skills did you bring to that process? Was your considerable experience of being a mother useful in working with artists? Not that I'm calling artists childish.

MS. FELSEN: I know, I don't want to be demeaning about that either, but I think raising children did have a lot to do with helping me understand about working with artists in the creative process. I came out of the Dr. Spock era of child-raising, and I offered my children a lot of freedom and wanted to encourage them to develop their own sense of independence. And I think this probably helped me to understand that an artist has his or her own direction and the best thing you can do for them is to facilitate that. And I think that came out of that child-rearing experience.

MS. AYRES: I've also felt too that that experience is underrated in business, because – they now call it multi-tasking and give a great deal of word play, where it is the name of the game if you are a mother –

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. AYRES: – knowing when to drop one thing and to pick up another.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: – and how not to let something go forever.

MS. FELSEN: Which reminds me of something. I don't know if this is interesting to you. But through these artists, we got to know a lot of interesting people, and I was just thinking of a conversation with Merce Cunningham. And I was telling him that just that day – he was in Los Angeles for a performance – just that day, I had been playing chess with my son Jimmy, who was probably 10 at the time. I was playing chess with him, and while we were playing, he was watching a baseball game on television and listening to music, and this was all going on at the same time. And it was all I could do to concentrate on the chess game, and I lost anyway. And so I remember Merce subsequently mentioned this in an interview but, I don't think he used the term "multi-tasking" –

MS. AYRES: No, that's the later term.

MS. FELSEN: – because that came later, but he was interviewed in the *L.A. Times* and he related that story about how in today's world people are doing more than one thing at a time, and particularly the young people are more able to do that. They're more equipped to do more than one thing at a time.

MS. AYRES: And it's become a cliché, but peculiarly with people being born into the computer world, it seems to me, it's doubled and tripled in terms of what people are expected to do.

Do you think this affects one's sense of time. People say as you grow older time goes faster, and I have felt that, but I've also heard youngsters say that they think time is going so quickly.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, I have not heard that from young people. I certainly know it just flies by, flies by for me now. And maybe that's because my days are so full.

MS. AYRES: Right.

MS. FELSEN: We do so many more things.

MS. AYRES: You were asked to leave Gemini in 1969 because of ongoing internal struggles with the Ken Tyler. Would you talk a little about this? In retrospect, was the struggle a clue to the fact that you might want to run your own show?

MS. FELSEN: I didn't know that yet. But my ego was always pretty strong, and there were things that bothered me about the way Ken Tyler ran certain things and I didn't agree with them. And in later years I probably would have, you know, kept my mouth shut and probably left of my own accord. But instead I chose to stand up to him, and the result was that I was asked to leave. But it bothered me. It really, really bothered me the way he was doing things.

MS. AYRES: And you weren't an employee, exactly. You were involved more –

MS. FELSEN: Exactly. Right. And it was a terrible, terrible blow to me because it meant so much to me to be there. It was a terrible, terrible blow, and I never recovered from the feeling that Sid had not really supported me in that. And Stanley. I felt both of them, neither one of them had supported me, and I thought that that was bad, because a few years later Ken Tyler left in a very angry situation.

MS. AYRES: Were they unable to see what the struggle was about? It seems to me if they're going to support one person or another, they have some grasp of the principle or issues involved.

MS. FELSEN: No, actually, I think that they agreed with me, but they felt that his role was more important than mine –

MS. AYRES: So that's where the hurt would really lie.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

MS. AYRES: You wouldn't have minded being disagreed with, but to be agreed with and then –

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: The '60s have been much romanticized, but they certainly had their moments. Do you remember the hippie scene on the Sunset Strip, the love-ins at Elysian Park, and the first few Renaissance Fairs before hippiedom became an industry?

MS. FELSEN: What love-ins in Elysian Park?! [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: You don't remember! I do. [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: Well, I was on the other side of town and I didn't come over to this side of town in those days. But I certainly knew, you know, Sunset Strip and all that, and we used to go to so many clubs. And gosh, there were still some jazz clubs in the early days in the '60s that we used to go to on the Sunset Strip. But having young children around too, you know, and their beginning to start high school, or junior high, anyway. So we were very much involved with the whole hippie scene and the whole art community and everybody. So I'm nostalgic about it. Yeah, I think it was a wonderful time.

MS. AYRES: Me too. And as you just indicated, the mid-'60s were also a time of tremendous antiwar protest organized amongst artist communities. Were you ever moved to be a political and social activist at any time in your life?

MS. FELSEN: Well, we registered voters at the gallery today. [Laughs.] We've done that for years. I'm always inspired to do this because it bothers me so much that, traditionally, in the art world there are people who aren't even registered to vote, and I just find that unbelievable. And so I try to get as many people to vote as possible. So that's probably as active as I've gotten.

Oh, I was involved with the Tom Bradley mayoralty election at one point.

MS. AYRES: In regard to art, what would you say is the difference between Agit-Prop, Agit Propaganda art and the often highly colored aspect of visual art that addresses issues of representation?

MS. FELSEN: Well, Agit Prop, of course, is a much more "of the moment" activity and it really has probably a stronger emotional impact. I have from time to time shown artists who are involved with artworks of a political nature. Erika Rothenberg is someone who comes to mind. And she certainly is very outspoken, and I'm all for that. I'm very comfortable with that.

MS. AYRES: I was going to ask you about Erika later, but maybe we can jump in and say a little bit right now. Her work has always fascinated me because it uses some of the formulas of advertising, and that's the directness you're talking about, but in a way that's quite witty, very ironic. Would you describe a piece?

MS. FELSEN: Well, let's see. A good piece that I can tell you about is a re-creation of a piece that she actually did 20 years ago called *Freedom of Expression* [that she did in collaboration with 2 other people]. And it was sponsored by Creative Time in New York, and it was originally in Battery Park. And what it was was this enormous loudspeaker in front of a staircase, and people were invited to climb the staircase and say anything they wanted over this loudspeaker which could be heard great distances around. And it was such a great success and people wrote about it and it was in the newspapers and everything. And this was, as I say, 20 years ago, so that would have been 1984.

MS. AYRES: Was that outside?

MS. FELSEN: It was outside, yes, in Battery Park. And now she was asked to redo it, but it's not in the same place. I've forgotten exactly where it is.

MS. AYRES: If my memory serves me, there was a variety of that piece at one of the Santa Barbara home-shows, except it was in somebody's house.

MS. FELSEN: That was a different piece. I know the one you're talking about. I forgot what that one was called.

MS. AYRES: But it was in a house.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. And that was about a politician standing and talking. This was about freedom of expression for anyone coming up. So that's quite a wonderful thing that she was asked to do this, to recreate it again 20 years later. And *The New York Times* covered it and it was quite successful.

MS. AYRES: So it's an example of a political piece that does its job in involving a lot of people but has some subtlety to its concept.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, exactly.

MS. AYRES: Any other of your artists might you consider to be political artists? Paul McCarthy in some ways?

MS. FELSEN: I was thinking, actually, of Jeffrey Vallance, who has done a lot of things. He actually did something before I was even showing him, when he was still a student at Otis. The *Cultural Ties* piece where he wrote letters to all the heads of states that he could research and find and sending them some necktie that he'd found in some thrift store, and in the name of cultural ties, and asked them to send him one back. And he actually got many of them back, one included from the Shah of Iran. And Jeffrey just loved the idea of thinking about the Shah going into his closet and thinking, "Now, let's see, which tie would be best to send to Jeffrey."

And he often has dealt with political figures. And it isn't about making any statement one way or the other, and he always approaches it in a deadpan sort of way. But it's about bringing your mind to think about what this character is about, because he thinks that politicians are such interesting people.

MS. AYRES: Well, his *Nixon Museum* is certainly a good example of something that pretends or is, matter of fact, but certainly does make a statement on one side.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: Maybe you might describe briefly the sad fate of Blinky.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, Blinky, yes. This was 1978, I believe, again when Jeffrey was still a student. He did this book called *Blinky, the Friendly Hen*. And in the book it describes and there's photographs of him going to Ralph's Supermarket and purchasing a chicken fryer, a whole chicken. And he brings it home, and it's seated or placed on a paper towel. And it's throwing out, I guess, creating the "Shroud of Blinky" on a paper towel. And then he has a coffin made and Blinky buried in the Los Angeles Pet Cemetery.

And so the whole thing is really dealing with our attitudes on death and dying. But everything, again, is absolute deadpan. And it shows how he goes to the pet cemetery, and then at the end of the story he lists all the costs, what the chicken cost and what the coffin cost and what the burial cost and so forth. And it was just a simple

thing like that.

And 10 years following that, he decided to do – well, actually, the Yonemoto brothers [Bruce and Norman Yonemoto] asked Jeffrey to do a video with them, they're video artists, and so they decided to do the 10-year anniversary of Blinky.

Jeffrey decided to exhume the body, the remains of Blinky, to determine the exact cause of death. So they got a pathologist from UCLA, Dr. Roy Wolford, who was a well-known pathologist, and he determined that the cause of death was trauma. And so this is all recorded on this videotape, going through this whole process.

Oh, I left out a part about how in order to get permission to exhume the body, they had to get a legal letter, so we arranged to have David Vena from Latham & Watkins, one of the stellar law firms downtown, to write a letter requesting this, that this was the purpose.

This all took place with a video camera rolling, the re-burying of the casket and remains. And that was it.

MS. AYRES: The process, the documentation, the involvement of bureaucracy, the involvement of the cemetery was all part of the artwork.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: This would be a complex example of what is sometimes called "Process Art," would it not be? [Laughs.] That the process is one of interaction.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, and it's performance and it's everything. It's all of these things.

MS. AYRES: Performance and video.

Did Blinky ever become something saleable, like a rubber chicken?

MS. FELSEN: Yes.

And so there was an exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum, and it was decided that it would be a wonderful thing to get an artificial chicken, a plastic –

MS. AYRES: Plastic, not rubber.

MS. FELSEN: – plastic chicken. And then they have a coffin and it was actually placed there and with lights on it and so forth.

But then a tragic thing happened the last day of the exhibition. Someone actually came in and stole the chicken out of the coffin. A collector by the name of Barry Sloane had lent this, and so Barry was not happy about this. Jeffrey at that time was not living in Los Angeles. He was living in Sweden, I think, at this time. And so he asked if Barry and I would go and find a chicken replacement. So we went to this place where they make Japanese sushi objects so that you know what kind of sushi you're going to get, so we were able to get them to provide us with a chicken.

MS. AYRES: And did Jeffrey have to authenticate this as his second –

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

MS. AYRES: – to make Barry Sloane happy?

MS. FELSEN: Barry Sloane was very happy.

MS. AYRES: And so it became part of the entire story.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Perhaps even gave more value to the second chicken. [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: I'm sure the story is not over yet.

MS. AYRES: We were talking about politics. And then there are also the politics of day-to-day struggle, which is the way I'm getting you out of Gemini.

And after leaving Gemini, how did you get involved with the Pasadena Art Museum, and what did you do there? Because it seems like leaving Gemini was probably, looking back on it, a good boot.

MS. FELSEN: It was indeed. And so I was home.

And then I guess John Coplans, who was the curator at the Pasadena Art Museum at the time, was visiting at Gemini one day and he was moaning and groaning about how there is so much work to do and they needed help. And they were getting ready to move from the little, small Chinese building on Los Robles Avenue in Pasadena to the new building, which is now the Norton Simon Museum, that was to be open in December of 1969, and this was October. And so Sid suggested to John that maybe I would be happy to work for him and help him out for a few months.

So that's what happened. John was very pleased to have me there. And this was the last year that artists were allowed to claim a deduction for a gift of art to a museum. So John was very busy going around and getting gifts of artworks from all the artists that he could find in Los Angeles – and elsewhere, I'm sure.

And there was also a Department of Photography that was being headed by Fred Parker, and there were so many photographs coming in and Fred needed help. So he wanted me to come help do the cataloguing of these photographs, which was an interesting thing for me because I knew very little about fine art photography. So this was a great learning experience for me. In cataloguing this work, I got to learn about these very interesting – these were contemporary photographers. It was not vintage or historical material. Oh, there were some Ansel Adams, but Ansel was still alive at that time, that's right.

But they had at the Museum a woman as registrar who had trained at the Museum of Modern Art. And so John said if I were to learn anything about how a museum operates, the best way is to learn registration. And so I trained under her and that's how I learned how to do that.

MS. AYRES: John himself was a critic and became the editor *Artforum* and wrote for *Artforum* and became a very well-known photographer himself later on. That registrar idea is a good one, but not one he followed himself, I don't think.

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] That's true.

MS. AYRES: What was he like to work with?

MS. FELSEN: Well, he was a tyrant, but I learned from him, too. He was very generous. And he decided that – I was getting more and more outspoken here again – and he decided that he needed me to be present at the meetings with the staff and the board of trustees. And in order to do that, he had to make me a curator. And considering my background in prints, he decided to call me a curator of prints. That's how things were done at small museums in those days. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Those days, yes. Yes, indeed.

There were some interesting curators there during his time and after he left. You worked a great deal with Barbara Haskell.

MS. FELSEN: Correct.

MS. AYRES: What was that like?

MS. FELSEN: That was wonderful. We got on very, very well. And we complemented one another's talents. And I had a good eye for installing, and she had a good mind. She was a good writer. And she curated exhibitions and I basically installed them for her.

MS. AYRES: With the help of a staff.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yes.

MS. AYRES: Pick-up labor, I believe, still – or volunteers, at least.

MS. FELSEN: Yes. Yes.

MS. AYRES: I recently saw a photograph of Marcel Duchamp in Las Vegas in 1963 seated with Betty Asher and Betty Factor and Monte Factor and some others. It would be impossible to sum up the lives of these people who were important in the development of the L.A. art scene, but did you know them at this time in 1963, and were they an influence on you in any way later on?

MS. FELSEN: They were an influence. I can't remember exactly what year I met them. I probably knew Betty Asher more than I knew Betty Factor, but maybe I knew them both. But I think what was impressive to me was seeing Betty Asher's collection, getting to know her, and seeing how very serious she was about art and art

collecting, and how knowledgeable she was, and that she was such a down-to-earth kind of person. And she had a good influence on me, I think, for that reason.

I think Betty and Monte Factor had another kind – they were more like patrons, I think. And while they were collectors, too, I think their patronage was so terribly important. And this is something that is rare in Los Angeles. I think another example of good patrons was – I'm changing the direction here a little bit – but another example of good patronage was Stanley and Elyse Grinstein. And there's so much that they do that people don't even know about because its not important to them that people know about what they do.

MS. AYRES: Well, then without being too specific, I'm interested in this issue of patronage and – [END TAPE 1, SIDE A] how you feel it doesn't exist enough in Los Angeles. I think you're talking about things about maybe being on the board of an art school or to offer commissions to artists when they might need them or –

MS. FELSEN: No, I'm talking about something more specific than that.

MS. AYRES: Okay.

MS. FELSEN: I'm talking about an artist wants to do a project, needs help and they're there to help them. And it's usually financially. Of course you have to be in a position to be able to do this, but there are plenty of people in this town with plenty of money, and it would never occur to them to – that this is something that you do. They do this because they want to, and they feel that an artist – this particular artist is going to make an important contribution, and they're going to make it possible for this artist to do that.

MS. AYRES: And they don't expect to –

MS. FELSEN: They expect nothing. They expect nothing.

MS. AYRES: Nothing at all.

MS. FELSEN: No. What gives them pleasure is simply that the art is being produced, and that's it.

MS. AYRES: And you were impressed by that attitude.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

MS. AYRES: And that would feed into your own sense of your position, without being too romantic, as partly one of service to a community – you yourself, as a dealer.

MS. FELSEN: I do feel that. I feel a really strong responsibility about it, very strong. And I feel – even artists who I no longer represent, I just feel that anything that they need to do, I think that that's the most important thing, whether they're with me or with another gallery. I think that they – that's what they need to do. If they're able to be more productive under a different kind of situation, then that's what they should do.

MS. AYRES: Because of the Pasadena Art Museum's humble acquisition program – and you just spoke about one of the ways of going about that – the Museum itself was able to contribute to the 1963 Duchamp exhibition in a very modest way. When you were at the Museum, you were able to curate a smaller Duchamp exhibition from the permanent collection, possibly under the banner of being the curator of prints. [Laughs.] How did that come about, and how did you go about it?

MS. FELSEN: Well, John Coplans one day came to me and he said, "Rosamund, this gallery is going to be available to you. I'd like you to just do an exhibition of Duchamp material." And that was all he told me. And so it was up to me to decide what to do, and I had certain guidelines, a time frame and so forth. He'd already informed the docents that I was going to be doing this, which I wasn't aware of. I didn't know that it was going to be necessary for me to talk to the docents about it. He'd forgotten that part.

So there was this wonderful Duchamp catalogue by Robert Lebel that – Walter Hopps, who had done his exhibition in 1963, didn't have enough time to really produce his own catalogue. So what he had done was he had torn out the captions from the Lebel book and used that to make his own catalogue.

MS. AYRES: And comments and corrections.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Or Duchamp also had quite a few corrections.

MS. FELSEN: And so I thought, well, I can kind of play off that. And so that's sort of how I, you know, got doing that, was just using that. It was like the next extension of that. And it took me some time to figure that out, but I

did it. And it was fun.

MS. AYRES: Coplans was followed as director by William Agee, who told you that – I have a quote – “you have such a wonderful sense of placement,” unquote.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, yes.

MS. AYRES: Duchamp once commented that the real collector selects paintings and puts them on the wall and, quote, “paints a collection.” I would think the same goes for the curator, who creates an installation by arranging works in an exhibition space in the service of the artist and the individual works. This is also a creative act. Do you think you have a natural gift for installation design? What have you learned over the years about, quote, “composing,” unquote, an exhibition?

MS. FELSEN: Well, I think there is a difference between installing an exhibition in a museum and installing an exhibition in a gallery. Sort of.

MS. AYRES: And in a home. [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: Oh, and definitely in a home. But I’m not even taking that into consideration. There’s all these windows in houses that complicate things.

And I kind of learned about the gallery installation over the years, of course, but actually, I can really think more about the gallery installation right now than the museum, because it’s been so long since I’ve done it. Usually, I mean, in a museum installation you’re guided by whatever essays you’ve written and – often, I would think – and how that art work should be best viewed in conjunction with the catalogue, because you’re making a certain point, I think.

Usually in a gallery situation, it’s brand new work by a specific artist and it’s a specific body of work. And what I have learned is that how – you try to make it as easy for the viewer to see the art as possible. At the same time, you want the work to be seen in its best possible light. And at the same time, you want the artist to be pleased with work seen in a particular context or arrangement. So there are all these three things that you have to kind of weave together and make sure that it makes sense.

MS. AYRES: You’re speaking about a single artist’s work. Talk a little bit about the particular challenges at a group exhibition, because you’ve done them –

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah. They are much more difficult, of course. And it’s just – I don’t know – I think it’s just a visual thing for me. Sometimes it’s, you know, a conceptual thing, but usually it’s a visual thing, because when you first walk into a gallery space it’s the visual that gets you first. So the impact better be correct.

MS. AYRES: It’s always been my feeling that if the visual thing works, the conceptual thing takes care of itself.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. AYRES: And everyone who comes in possibly draws a different conceptual conclusion to the visual, which is all to the good.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. AYRES: Which is all to the good.

MS. FELSEN: Generally, I think, the visual is seen from a distance, initially, and the conceptual, you know, requires a little more intimacy.

MS. AYRES: Well, we’re still on the Pasadena Art Museum, oddly as it may seem. Lest we forget, what were the glories of the Pasadena Art Museum? It was much beloved at the time, and of course, I’m going to ask you next what happened. But I’d like you to just remind people what a tremendously interesting institution it was.

MS. FELSEN: Well, it was, because it was the only game in town. And there was very little going on at the L.A. County Museum. Of course, this was long before MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles] was born. Maurice Tuchman at LACMA had his big blockbuster shows every five years or so – or maybe it was even less often than that. And then Jane Livingston was another curator. She did a wonderful Bruce Nauman – his first retrospective exhibition. But there wasn’t an ongoing momentum at LACMA, in terms of contemporary art, at that time.

So the Pasadena Art Museum was the place. And it was constant. And it was a combination of established artists and younger artists. And John Coplans was doing work by more established artists, and Barbara Haskell was

more interested in the younger artists. And that's how it developed. So she – since I seemed to know a lot of these young artists – how did I come to know all these young artists? I guess through Gemini; there had been some printers who were working there. And through them I got to know a lot of the young artists in town. And so she and I would go out on studio visits together. And I think with my support she put together these exhibitions.

MS. AYRES: The museum itself had a very active docents program.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, they did.

MS. AYRES: And you touched on that. Would you talk a little bit about docent programs and their value and why the Pasadena one appeared to be different from, say, the docent program at LACMA?

MS. FELSEN: Well, it's kind of unfair to ask me, because I'm not that familiar with LACMA's program. I don't recall having been on a docent tour at LACMA. But I know some of the people who have been docents at LACMA, and I knew all the docents at Pasadena very, very well. There was a woman by the name of Nancy Yewell who was a very active docent, and she also worked as a volunteer press officer for the museum. So she knew a lot of what was going on, and she would often come to me and say, "Well, Rosamund, what is Jasper Johns' work about?" You know? And she really wanted to know, and it was going – they went beyond the briefing of a particular exhibition. They wanted to know everything.

And a lot of the women were involved with the support group called the Pasadena Art Alliance, which is still going on. And these women were fantastic. And it wasn't just about a social thing. I mean, they really believed in what they were doing, and they took it to heart. And they had initiative enough to go out on their own and find out more about stuff.

MS. AYRES: This sounds so trivial, but I remember going to the Museum with my dad out from New York and eating in their cafe.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah.

MS. AYRES: And he was so impressed by the waitress who actually was a docent, or a woman who lived in the neighborhood, who had brought her own lemon meringue pies to serve.

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] It was really, you know, it was just like – it was a big family. There was a great, great spirit. Great spirit.

MS. AYRES: Which is why it was so sad when it closed. It seemed to me – it also had a design department. It did a great Bauhaus show, I believe.

MS. FELSEN: Correct.

MS. AYRES: And a music concert series –

MS. FELSEN: Yes.

MS. AYRES: The programming was very ambitious and the staffing was probably not up to that programming, it never is, but people do it. That can't be the reason for its failing.

Would you talk a little bit about why the museum closed – not because it was too ambitious – and why it had to close? And can you discuss the roles of Bob Rowan and Frederick Weisman and, of course, Norton Simon himself?

MS. FELSEN: This came during the recession, and I think there was a great deal of naiveté about this museum. The Pasadena folks and all the people involved – I mean, like Marcia Weisman was very much involved and she didn't live in Pasadena. But the people involved with the Museum – probably they wanted it to grow and develop, but they didn't make the correct financial arrangements for it. There was no endowment.

And times were changing and things were growing very quickly, and things were getting much more expensive. And their programming was getting more and more ambitious. And it used to be that when the museum was short of cash, you know, Bob Rowan or whoever else, Gifford Phillips, would reach in their pockets and "Oh, here's some extra money for you," you know. But that was no longer possible. So I think it just caved in because of this naive attitude. So Norton Simon, of course –

MS. AYRES: Who was the brother of Marcia Weisman.

MS. FELSEN: Coincidentally. And I remembered going to a dinner party at Marcia Weisman's, and Norton was there. This was before this collapse. And she had her Jasper Johns map painting hanging in the dining room. And

everyone else at the party was in another room, but Sid and I and Norton found ourselves standing in her dining room alone, and Norton was looking at this painting. And I tried to engage him in conversation about it and he had no interest in this painting whatsoever. And so later I talked to Marcia about this, and she said never, ever talk to Norton about art that was made after World War I. That's what she said. That's not exactly accurate. Well, yeah, it probably is pretty accurate.

But Norton had long been looking for – I guess he had tried to do something with LACMA and that didn't work out for his collection. And then he – he had had some major sculptures on loan for some time at the Pasadena Art Museum, and then when he – I guess the museum had gone to him for help. And he said, "Well, I can help you by letting me" – "I'll take over your debts for you; I'll take over all the debts for you if you let me take over the collection in the museum and you won't have any, you know, responsibilities there." I mean, this went on for – there was lots of going back and forth, but that's how it ended up.

MS. AYRES: Well, what happened to this so-called modest collection? I mean, I call it modest. It might not have been modest. What happened to the Pasadena Art Museum collection after he took over?

MS. FELSEN: Well, the collection of contemporary art – the first thing he wanted to do was to get rid of it. And he started putting it up at auction and some of the former trustees, Bob Rowan and Alfred Esberg – put a stop to it. And they got a restraining order, so prevented him from being able to do that. So the work is still there.

MS. AYRES: I remember – it must have been in the late '80s – going into their storage and seeing works by – famous works now by, say, George Herms and Bruce Conner –

MS. FELSEN: Absolutely.

MS. AYRES: – that were just under sort of bubble wrap pushed in the corner. Since that time they've been lent to LACMA and MOCA –

MS. FELSEN: That's right.

MS. AYRES: – which seems to me the reasonable and right thing to do.

MS. FELSEN: Which is what they had done, and I think that arrangement has worked out very nicely. Finally. But it took a long time for that to happen.

MS. AYRES: And of course they had the Galka Scheyer collection and that they have paid a great deal of attention to.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: Rightly so.

You left the Pasadena Art Museum in 1974. Why?

MS. FELSEN: Well, that was – the handwriting was on the wall, and the Museum was about to close. And Norton was ready to take over, and it happened to coincide with when Ken Tyler decided that he wanted to leave Gemini and there was a big lawsuit. And anyway, it was all settled and then he left and they needed me back. And so there were certain things that Ken had done that they didn't know how to do but I did. For example, a printing of publications – I mean, their advertising publications, brochures. For every publication that Gemini puts out there is a brochure. And so I took on that responsibility, among others – and documentation of the prints and things like that.

MS. AYRES: Had the Museum experienced changed you?

MS. FELSEN: Yes, it did. And I had a lot more experience now and it – oh, yeah. The registration experience really helped me a lot –

MS. AYRES: So John was right? [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. He was right. And I created new documentation sheets for Gemini and for the whole print world actually. A documentation sheet specifies each and every aspect of the print and authenticates it and everything, and it's signed by the artist and by an officer at Gemini. And I was just generally the public affairs person. And that's sort of what I did.

MS. AYRES: So to some degree what you called your social skills were developing. They developed – did develop at Pasadena. You worked more with the public, with the docents, with artists, with the general community.

MS. FELSEN: Well, when I was still at the museum, there was a period in the early time that I was there that I wasn't even able to go into the galleries when the galleries were open because I could not bear listening to some of the comments that the public would make. It was too painful for me. And so I was always downstairs in the offices and – but you know, gradually I learned, you know, we're all – it's okay. It doesn't hurt me so much anymore, and I realize that they know not what they say.

MS. AYRES: And there were also changes in your personal life now?

MS. FELSEN: Well, that happened after I was there for a couple of years.

MS. AYRES: At Gemini again.

MS. FELSEN: At Gemini, yeah. In '76 Sid and I decided to divorce and so – well, Sid and Stanley, the remaining partners, asked me to stay on. This seemed like an impossible thing to do, so I just left.

MS. AYRES: Who was the new master printer at Gemini when you went back, and did you get along?

MS. FELSEN: It then was a man named Serge Lozingot, and he had trained in France and he was very highly skilled.

MS. AYRES: And you got along well with him –

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah.

MS. AYRES: You respected each other.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. And I got along well with all the printers and the curators and so forth. Yeah.

MS. AYRES: And now there was, after leaving Gemini, there was another opportunity to go to UCLA.

MS. FELSEN: That's right.

MS. AYRES: But you decided to work for the Timothea Stewart Gallery instead. Who is Timothea Stewart, and how did your involvement with her gallery come about?

MS. FELSEN: Well, again, same thing happened again. There I was at home and Timothea Stewart came in and visited Sid and said she was about to open a gallery and did he know anyone who could come and work for her? [Laughter.] And so he suggested me again. So she called me, and I barely knew her; I knew her a little bit. And her father had been Bart Lytton, who had been a successful savings and loan person in town and he was also an art collector. He gave a lot of money to LACMA. His name was on the building at LACMA that is now the Hammer Building. But due to one of those recessions when those savings and loans went into difficulties, he lost his money, and therefore they took his name off the building and gave it to Armand Hammer instead.

So he was a very flamboyant character and she was an only child, Timothea. And her father at this point had died. Her mother had just died, I think. And she was out on her own, but she did have some money and she decided that she wanted to open this gallery. The gallery that she wanted to open, the space was formerly the Riko Mizuno Gallery, and it was just this really precious little gallery on La Cienega that everybody loved. And she was going to open with a Wallace Berman exhibition.

So the combination of these two things – this was in April or May of 1977, and she wanted to open in May, I think it was, and I was supposed to be going to UCLA that September. I was all accepted and everything, set. And I said, "Well, I'll help you out for the summer time." So the combination of the Wallace Berman show and that space, I thought it was just too nice to pass up.

So I went to work there, and it was just like – I was the person there, and she would show up at 4:00 in the afternoon for 15 minutes or so. And so people would come in and I would just sit there. I didn't know the first thing about selling anything and Wallace Berman wasn't exactly a big seller in those days. Many people didn't even know who he was. And this, of course, was after he had died. And she had a spiritual connection with Wallace Berman. That was what her interest was. And she – this exhibition was up for five months and nothing sold because I didn't have a clue of an idea of how to go about selling anything, so I just kind of sat there. Then at the end of five months she decided that we would have a second show, and the second show consisted of art works that she'd got on consignment from Bob Rowan, who was a friend of hers. And they were – big Larry Poon paintings and big color field paintings, and didn't sell anything there either.

Oh, I left out the part about why I didn't go back to UCLA. I don't know, I just felt comfortable in the situation, and I felt I don't need to go to school; I needed to be here. And I enjoy the artist community, you know, all the local artists that I'd gotten to know from working at the Museum.

And so the second show went up and that was up for four months and nothing sold. And then she decided that she was going to close the gallery. She'd done what she wanted to do. She wanted to have this Wallace Berman show and that was it. And everybody said, "Oh, Rosamund, you should take over the gallery." Me? Take over the gallery? Everybody's telling me that I should do this, and I said, Okay. So I took over – [laughs] – the gallery.

MS. AYRES: Would you say in some sense that her gallery was a vanity operation? Two shows, deciding to close it –

MS. FELSEN: No, not vanity. Well, in a sense maybe, but the primary thing was the spiritual thing. She was involved with this spiritual organization and this was a very important thing for her to do. I think she didn't – it's kind of like George Bush in Iraq, you know? You go in there and you do something but you don't have any long-term plans after that, and I think that was how it happened.

MS. AYRES: How privy were you to her business arrangements? I was going to say with the artists in her gallery, but she had no stable of artists. She was just doing –

MS. FELSEN: She had no stable.

MS. AYRES: So there were no business arrangements.

MS. FELSEN: No. No.

MS. AYRES: And you were involved in selling works of art, but in point of fact, it was not a reality that these works would sell?

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: It's almost like saying look, there's a barn, let's put on a musical. You do it out of love, you do it out of love.

MS. FELSEN: Right, exactly.

MS. AYRES: That sort of thing wouldn't happen today.

MS. FELSEN: No, of course not. Of course not.

MS. AYRES: So there was something about the spirit of the times.

MS. FELSEN: It was something about that and the fact that she was comfortable. And every day she would say well, any sales or anything like that? No. I didn't know the first thing about sales. I had never been involved with sales.

MS. AYRES: Well, we have reached 1978, with a few jumps into the future, and your gallery. I wanted to ask you, first, what were your – you've answered a little bit but I want to pursue it a little bit. What were your personal experiences of important Los Angeles galleries in the '50s, '60s and '70s – the gallery scene that preceded the opening of your gallery? Ferus's place in history is pretty secure, but there was also Ceejee, Virginia Dwan – you've spoken about that – David Stuart, Nicholas Wilder, Molly Barnes, Eugenia Butler, Rolf Nelson, Riko Mizuno, Gagosian. It was a small world but a lot was happening.

MS. FELSEN: And Felix Landau.

MS. AYRES: Yes, there are many more.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, yes. And I think probably the two galleries that impressed – well, aside from Dwan, but that was long closed.

MS. AYRES: And we've spoken of Dwan, yes.

MS. FELSEN: And probably Eugenia Butler and Nick Wilder were the most interesting to me. I was most interested in Eugenia Butler's artists and the art that she showed. Nick had a scene going on there that was interesting, and he was such a wonderful person. And he was just really great to spend time with and to talk with about art. And that was what was interesting. His sensibility was not my sensibility at all. But that didn't matter because I liked him so much.

MS. AYRES: Molly Barnes.

MS. FELSEN: And Molly. Well, Molly – I always think of Molly as showing like joke art. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: But she showed John Baldessari –

MS. FELSEN: But she showed Baldessari – yes, she did. There's some jokes in John's work. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: [Laughs.] How about Gagosian, who is such a sort of live legend in the art world?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah. Well, I always liked Larry. I didn't know him when he had his Westwood gallery, but later he had the space that I ended up having. I referred to it as the Riko Mizuno Gallery; then it became the Gagosian Gallery; then it was Timothea's gallery, and then it was mine.

So he was there for two years. And I did know him a bit, and I liked him. Larry has a really, really good eye and he knows about art and he's an interesting character.

MS. AYRES: Would you describe the La Cienega space in some detail as to who helped designed the space? I particularly remember a magical sense of light, and I have a trace memory, perhaps false, of the color blue. I think it must have been the light.

MS. FELSEN: That was the blue sky that was coming through.

MS. AYRES: That was the sky. That was the sky.

MS. FELSEN: Sure. No, what it was – when Riko had the gallery – well, first it was Rolf Nelson – no, first it was Esther Robles, then it was Rolf Nelson. When Rolf Nelson had that gallery, he showed – this was in the early '60s – I remember seeing my first Georgia O'Keeffe painting. He had some Georgia O'Keeffes in his gallery there. But he had put in a parquet wood floor. In fact, one of the people who put it in for him was Joe Goode, who was a young artist at the time. Then when Riko had the gallery she had an Ed Moses show. Ed decided that there should be some natural daylight coming in there, and he said, "Why don't we just take off the roof?"

[Audio break.]

So he decided that he needed natural light and that they should take the roof off. So they took the roof off. And so he had this exhibition, and I'm sure leaves were blowing in, whatever, but it didn't matter. But then Riko started getting nervous about the landlord – "what if the landlord comes and he sees the roof is taken off?" – because they went ahead and did this without his permission, of course. So she said we have to put the roof back. So Bob Irwin, another artist that she was showing at the time, said: "Well, wait a second. Before you put the roof back in, let's put some skylights in." So he designed these, as I recall – they're two 14-foot-long by two-and-a-half-feet-wide skylights. And the proportions of the room were almost – as Keith Sonnier said when he first saw it, it was almost like a golden section; it was just such a perfect proportion that space. Beautiful space.

MS. AYRES: Beautiful.

I was going to ask you how many of these galleries were clustered on La Cienega Boulevard. But I also get the sense that chronologically this space was a cluster, that it housed a series of galleries. But there were other galleries, and of course, we're talking about the '50s, the '60s and the '70s. That's a big spread. La Cienega did have a critical mass of galleries up and down the block.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, before I was there actually. By the time I got there the major galleries were no longer there. I mean, there was – you know, like an Ankrum Gallery. Abe Adler was up front and –

MS. AYRES: Was Manny Silverman across there yet or did he come later? He had a gallery on the corner up two blocks.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. But that was –

MS. AYRES: Or was it later?

MS. FELSEN: That was much later. That was much later.

Do you know that I had forgotten that he was in that space? That's interesting.

So – and Hunsaker-Schlesinger was across the way. But there weren't that many, you know, important galleries here at that time – Adam Mekler.

MS. AYRES: You must have realized the excitement and the commitment and, if you don't think I'm being romantic, the service to the community aspect of opening a gallery. Were you also aware of the financial risks? Were they as high then as they are now? Did you feel you needed the security of a committed outside backer?

MS. FELSEN: No, because I was probably too naive. I just – I felt, well, I'll just go ahead and do it, and if it doesn't work I'll do something else. But I didn't even think that. I just thought well, that's what I'll do, and I wasn't really concerned. But of course, the financial aspects weren't really as difficult as they are today. Rents, of course, were nothing compared to what they are now, for example.

MS. AYRES: May I ask how the gallery was financed in a general way?

MS. FELSEN: I did it myself.

MS. AYRES: Did you manage to purchase Gemini prints when you were working there?

MS. FELSEN: Well –

MS. AYRES: At Gemini – as owner you didn't –

MS. FELSEN: As an owner I didn't have to purchase. And so each – we were each allotted one from almost every publication.

MS. AYRES: And by this time was that helpful in providing a certain fallback position?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Sure.

MS. AYRES: Who were the artists who were important in forming your gallery's sensibility? Did you in a difficult situation ever ask yourself what would so and so say or do? And I'm thinking of people like Wallace Berman or Ellsworth Kelly or Bob Rauschenberg, but there must have been others who, in a very subtle way, influenced your sensitivity to art and exhibiting art.

MS. FELSEN: Not in terms of choices of artists to work with.

MS. AYRES: No, I'm talking in terms of a general attitude –

MS. FELSEN: Yes, exactly. No – I quoted this before, but one of my favorite things that I've ever learned from any artist is what Bob Rauschenberg told me once, is that if you are working in a particular direction and you feel that you're up against a brick wall, don't keep beating your head against it; you turn around and go in the other direction. And that has saved my life.

MS. AYRES: You said earlier that Timothea Stewart had a sort of spiritual connection to Wallace Berman. Did you feel any of that in the sense of his phrase, "Art is God is Love"?

MS. FELSEN: No – [laughs].

MS. AYRES: That meant nothing to you?

MS. FELSEN: I mean, I knew Wallace very well, because he had gone to high school with Sid, and so I'd known him for a long time. And I liked him very, very much and had an enormous amount of respect for him. But I didn't have that spiritual thing for him.

MS. AYRES: And George Herms, too, would often, and still does, print L-O-V-E around his works.

MS. FELSEN: Well, that's like –

MS. AYRES: Do you think that's particularly of the moment – ?

MS. FELSEN: That was '60s.

MS. AYRES: – '60s, late '60s, early '70s hippie –

MS. FELSEN: More so in George's case. I think Wallace came more out of the Beatnik movement than the hippie movement.

MS. AYRES: And George more – younger – out of the hippie movement.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. But George, you know, used to tell me – George and I are the same age – and George used to tell me, "Well, Rosamund, you know why you and I like blues music so much, because we were born at the" – you know – "the depth of the Depression. So that was his – [laughs] – explanation of that.

MS. AYRES: Do you think in a way that they're the most important artists that came out of the Beatnik, hippie movement in Los Angeles? It seems to me there's always such a push to include artists in that movement that

had nothing to do with it really – Bob Rauschenberg, for instance, because he made "Combines." There's a certain –

MS. FELSEN: He influenced it –

MS. AYRES: He influenced it. But I don't think you would ever call him a –

MS. FELSEN: No.

MS. AYRES: Whereas I think you would call George Herms a hippie artist.

MS. FELSEN: Yes. Well, also because they had a connection with the Bay Area hippies too and Beatniks, and they had that connection with the writers and poets and so forth.

MS. AYRES: I've always thought, obviously, that marijuana and LSD and other drugs were crucial to a kind of hippie vision in the arts. Do you agree? Did you experiment with drugs in those days at all?

MS. FELSEN: Not much. No. I was always afraid of losing control. And you know, smoked marijuana and so forth – and I tried cocaine once and I didn't like it. And hash, I remember, was a different – but it just put me to sleep or else make me talk a lot. But I never tried anything more serious than that.

MS. AYRES: Yeah, that's a little tangent, but there it is. "God is Art is Love" –

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: – [laughs] – drugs and rock 'n' roll and sex. Okay.

I believe the artists you showed in your first year were Guy Dill, Keith Sonnier, Richard Jackson, Peter Lodato, Alexis Smith, Maria Nordman, and Bill Wegman. No one of these is a traditional painter or sculptor. One or another of them touch on light-space art, appropriated text, photographs or on other non-traditional or conceptual gambits. Did that reflect the current situation, or were you drawn especially to what was then experimental art?

MS. FELSEN: Well, what happened was when I started the gallery, there were all these floating artists around because they – their previous galleries had closed. Alexis Smith had been with Nick Wilder; he was closing. And there were – Claire Copley had been around and she was closed. So the artists that I – the artists who needed to be represented, I think, and the ones that I knew, and I don't know that I had a particular direction; it was just, you know, art that I was interested in and that I felt was – needed to be shown. I think that's how I – I don't know that there was a connecting link so much with – among the artists. I haven't been able to find out.

MS. AYRES: Other than the fact that they weren't traditional painters or sculptors, with the possible exception of Guy Dill, but even there.

Your second year saw a tremendous event, which was the showing of Chris Burden's *The Big Wheel* in 1979. How did that come about?

MS. FELSEN: Well, Chris just came walking in the door one day and he said he has this new piece. You know, Chris for many years had just been doing performance. And he had shown his relics at Gagosian in that same space. And then the following year he showed his *Full Financial Disclosure* with Jan Baum. But he didn't really have a home. He didn't really have a place. So he had this new piece that he wanted to show with me, and was I interested? And I said sure. So he invited me down to his studio and I saw the *Big Wheel*, and he put it in motion.

I had enormous respect for Chris, and maybe somebody else would have been nervous about showing this because it looked like it could be dangerous. But I trusted him because I knew how smart he was. I knew that he knew what he was doing in terms of mechanical things.

MS. AYRES: Yes, I've always thought of Chris as something of a magician in the sense that he's always very careful and assured about what his effects are going to be. Many of them were dangerous, but if they involved, say, fire he would be sure to cover himself with Vaseline or something like that. I think in that sense he was – he had his own body and life to be concerned with, and he was trustworthy.

MS. FELSEN: Absolutely.

MS. AYRES: Did you see any of those early performances that live mostly in documentation and legend?

MS. FELSEN: No, I never saw them.

MS. AYRES: Why did he give them up?

MS. FELSEN: He was getting older. I think it had to do with that. He was – and maybe getting a little more careful.

MS. AYRES: He also gave them up at a time when he was being invited by university galleries to come do performances. I had the sense – and, again, maybe this is romantic – that he felt they had run their course, that they were now too established.

One of my favorite ones is the one where he just points to the hole in his arm –

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: – from the first *Shoot* piece because it seems to me that sort of sums up the attitude. The publicity is more important than the art work, and then he gave that up.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, but one of my favorite ones – I forgot what it was called – but when the Contemporary Art Council from LACMA came for a studio visit to his studio. And so they knocked on the door. This is when he was in Venice. They knocked on his door and he opened the door and he invited them to come in. And there was nothing really for them to see very much, but he sat – they could see him. And so he sat down at his desk and he made some notes or whatever he's doing, and then he gets up and makes some coffee and goes back to his desk. And then he gets up and goes to the bathroom and then he comes back – oh, I left out an important part. When they came to the door, he asked – he demanded that they pay him each a dollar, and they were outraged because they had already paid for this trip. But you know, if they want to see an artist, what an artist does in a studio, he was showing them.

MS. AYRES: Yes, it – yes.

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: It's like showing the hole. It's playing to the expectations and kind of dashing them –

MS. FELSEN: Right.

Chris was among a number of soon-to-become important artists – and one might mention Ed Ruscha and John Baldessari, although, as you say, he wasn't very well known at this moment – who chose to remain in Southern California rather than build a career in New York. Can you pinpoint a time when there seemed to be a critical mass of important artists pursuing successful careers in Los Angeles?

MS. FELSEN: That I think didn't really happen until the late '70s, early '80s, and it just happened to coincide with when I had the gallery in the early years. So I think it was because it was getting more and more expensive in New York for artists to go there. There were more jobs for artists in Southern California because of all the art schools. And it was easier to get work done in L.A. and –

MS. AYRES: And it was more pleasant to live here.

MS. FELSEN: That's what I think, but you know a lot of people wouldn't agree with that. But I'm sure that that's true.

MS. AYRES: Somehow the artists seemed to surface –

MS. FELSEN: But you know, I don't think that was an issue with the artists, about being a pleasant place to live. Maybe today, but in those days –

MS. AYRES: People come to L.A. now as artists to live, sometimes they're moving to L.A. now because they can –

MS. FELSEN: Now they do – because there used to be a stigma, you know, against L.A.

MS. AYRES: Yes.

MS. FELSEN: You know, a long –

MS. AYRES: Yes, but if it wasn't a pleasant place to be they wouldn't do it.

MS. FELSEN: That's right.

MS. AYRES: I'm not saying it's the primary motive. In fact, I was going to ask you somewhere down the line, this may be a good place to do it: Do you remember that period where they tried to make downtown L.A. into a

gallery scene?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah.

MS. AYRES: And it more or less developed into a real estate scene and various artist complexes, which is useful.

MS. FELSEN: Sure.

MS. AYRES: I always felt that they were trying to make living in L.A. be like living in an awful loft in the Bowery in New York and that it was guaranteed not to –

MS. FELSEN: I know. They were asking me and people were telling me, oh, I should go – Chuck Arnoldi said, "I want to take you downtown; I think you should be buying a building downtown." He wasn't even one of my artists, but he was a friend.

MS. AYRES: What date is this? What are we talking about now? I can't –

MS. FELSEN: This would have been '82 to '84.

MS. AYRES: '82 to '84; that's right.

MS. FELSEN: That's my guess.

MS. AYRES: That's my guess, too.

MS. FELSEN: And so people were saying, "You should move your gallery downtown; it's great there. You can get these great spaces." And I kept telling them the same thing, "I'm an uptown girl, I'm not a downtown girl." [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Yes, and I think collectors found difficulty going down there. It wasn't always –

MS. FELSEN: Well, they're going to Chinatown now. That's probably easier –

MS. AYRES: Yes, but they – and they have protected parking lots in Chinatown. The whole sense of leaving your car downtown was sort of like a waiting target –

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. That's true.

MS. AYRES: – it seems to me. And Chinatown is not that way at all.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Anyway, summing up: L.A. artists seemed to circumvent New York altogether and build careers in Europe first. Ed Kienholz might be the pioneer in that, but I think it's true of some of our conceptual artists, too.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, also Bruce Nauman, who was living here at that time. Absolutely. And he, you know, at that time was showing at Castelli, but Castelli wasn't able to sell his work in those days. It was Konrad Fischer in Germany who was selling all of his work. And so he got his early reputation in Europe and primarily in Germany. But Baldessari was showing there with a lot of the New York conceptual artists like Lawrence Weiner and people like that – Bob Barry. And so it was that circuitous route that the artist had to take in those days.

MS. AYRES: All of which took the edge off the thought that New York was the only place you needed to be.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: The decade of the '70s in your life encompasses the last years at the Pasadena Art Museum, the brief return to Gemini, the opening of your L.A. La Cienega Gallery in 1978, and its first two extremely interesting years. The '70s saw the explosion of conceptual art and site-specific art and architectural sculpture and generally, art of an ephemeral nature even in materials or duration. How does a dealer in art survive in such a climate and how do the artists survive?

MS. FELSEN: Well, either you're rich – the dealer is rich, which I wasn't. I had some finances behind me but not a great deal, and I didn't want to squander it. By this time I was learning that I had to have a certain relationship with the collectors.

Now in those early days when I first opened the gallery, I was fortunate in that the art world was pretty small. I knew all the artists. I knew all the museum people. I knew all the writers. I knew all the collectors. Everybody did; it wasn't just me. Everyone knew everybody. So people were happy that I opened this gallery because, as I

mentioned before, many of the other galleries had already closed. And they loved the space. They loved coming there, even though it was terrible to find a place to park – [laughs] – that was the worst thing, and that my office was a kitchen. But people loved it; they thought it was charming, you know.

So I had to learn how to talk about the art to collectors, and I was used to talking about art with artists, but talking with collectors is different. And this was before people started thinking about art in terms of an investment, so what you had to do – well, people were at that time still thinking about what would look nice over their couch. But I had to get beyond that and help – [Audio break] –

MS. AYRES: We were talking about conceptual art and how a dealer survives in such a climate, and possibly even more to the point, how the artists survives.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, well the easy part is – for the artist is if they're lucky enough to get teaching jobs – and that's another story about why Los Angeles has become such an important art center is because of all the wonderful art schools here that are staffed by, you know, this incredible faculty of artists. Now in New York there is a market that can support so many more artists than in Los Angeles, which doesn't have the size of the marketplace that New York does. So artists are perfectly willing to get teaching jobs at the various universities and art schools. This in turn attracts young art students who want to study with a particular artist, and before you know it you have this burgeoning art community, which is what we have now.

In answer to your question about how does the gallery survive – well, in my case, when the likes of Mike Kelley came walking in the door and wanted to know if I was interested in showing him, I said sure. And he said he wanted to show – I think this was in November of '82 – I'm just guessing it was about that month. And he said he wanted to show in February the following year, which is like in three months. And I said sure. I didn't have a slot in February, but I had seen a little bit of Mike's work. I had seen – more important, I had seen one of his performances, and I thought he was brilliant and I just changed my schedule. And I thought this was too important to pass up.

So along came Bob Rowan, who I had known, of course, from my Pasadena Art Museum days, and he had been a big proponent of color field painting and New York artists, and that's what he was collecting, although he did also collect Nauman, which is – he's kind of a contradiction. But he just became very enthralled with Mike Kelley's work and he saved my life. He helped me keep my doors open because he was interested in what I was doing. And his most favorite artist that I showed, at that time, was Mike Kelley. And he bought a lot of his work – more than I think – for a number of years he was Mike's biggest collector.

So it was up to me – you know, if I wanted the gallery to succeed in showing this conceptual art, it was up to me to get it across to the collectors. And that's – the responsibility was mine.

MS. AYRES: You also seem to indicate that one or two artists in a stable might make it possible for the other artists to keep going – or for you to keep going, even if they didn't sell –

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: – which also gave you the freedom to take a flier on people –

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: – have a show that you know wasn't going to be popular.

MS. FELSEN: Right, right, exactly. It seems kind of unfair to the artist that is selling. But nonetheless, I think, you know, the better the artist the more generous they are, I've always found.

MS. AYRES: Could be. Are they – it's interesting what you say about the schools and the way in which they provide jobs for artists. And I don't know if schools themselves feel that responsibility or are grateful enough for what it does for the larger community in terms of making a scene which makes their school more viable.

MS. FELSEN: They don't understand that?

MS. AYRES: Well, I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

What I wanted to ask was about San Francisco, which had a prominence before Los Angeles. For some – part of that had to do with the schools in San Francisco, that artists tend to stay in San Francisco for many reasons, but also because they could get work. And they had those schools before we had all our – most of ours schools here.

MS. FELSEN: That's right.

MS. AYRES: So they play a really important role.

MS. FELSEN: Definitely. I think if San Francisco didn't continue to be a forefront, I think it's just simply because it's a smaller town. I can't think of any other reason why it wouldn't.

MS. AYRES: In the 1970s many site-specific installations and performances also were presented in a remarkable number of alternative and university or college art galleries with extraordinary, prescient curators – or directors. Would you say a little bit about Bob Smith at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, LAICA?

MS. FELSEN: Well, it wasn't really until after he was gone that I really appreciated – I think I just took him for granted – that this was an alternative space and that's what alternative spaces do. And then when he was no longer there, I realized that the alternative space is only as good as its director or its curator or whoever's in charge of the program. And all it takes is one person. And the same thing happened when Joy Silverman was at LACE.

MS. AYRES: Well, LACE – Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions. LACE on the other hand, has survived. The directors there were Marc Pally, Joy Silverman, I think Ben Marks, Gwen Darien, Brian Karl, and now Irene Tsatsos. This is an institution that eats directors up to some degree, I think. The LACE director is also the curator, and it is an extremely intense, time-consuming job, one that depends on a lot of interns and artists and even board member/volunteers. LACE was founded primarily as an artist-run space. Was it not?

MS. FELSEN: That's correct.

MS. AYRES: And it served primarily emerging artists, especially with the LACE Annuale?

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Are the times right for such a space at the moment? How often did you go to LACE in the past, and how often do you go now?

MS. FELSEN: I hardly go, and I live very close to it. But I think it is a sign of the times. I think there isn't the need for doing the same kinds of thing that they used to do because the galleries are doing that now. And I think they have to rethink their programming if they're going to really be as significant a presence as they once were. I think what happened with LAICA was that Bob Smith used to travel so much – and he used to bring so many foreign artists here too – and that was very important, not only for the community here to see the work, but the influence that it had upon the artists working here.

MS. AYRES: Yet when under Gwen Darien, whose mandate was to bring this sort of international or national programming to LACE, it seemed to be a mistake. The real mandate for LACE does seem to be a local, artist-run space.

You may disagree?

MS. FELSEN: I don't know. I think one of the nicest shows that I saw at LACE in recent years was the one commemorating the magazine *High Performance*, which documented the whole history of that magazine. And that was quite a significant show.

MS. AYRES: Yeah, they do – they also had an exhibition commemorating *The Years of Bliss* – [laughs] – so to speak – which was a small artist-run gallery in Pasadena. There certainly is a place for what seems to be like very local almost in-group situations.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I think they have to rethink their programming.

MS. AYRES: Do you think the move to Hollywood Boulevard was a good one?

MS. FELSEN: No.

MS. AYRES: I don't either.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I think they should get out of there, but I don't know where they should go; but that's their problem.

MS. AYRES: Then also in the '70s there was the work of Hal Glicksman at Otis –

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yes.

MS. AYRES: – wonderful conceptual exhibitions of On Kawara and Daniel Buren, for instance. Could such difficult exhibitions, which would bring prestige, but no sales, have been held in a commercial gallery?

MS. FELSEN: Well, that's true. But I think that museums should be doing that kind of thing.

MS. AYRES: Did you kind of take Hal for granted, too, that that's just the sort of exhibitions he should be doing?

MS. FELSEN: No, Hal I didn't take for granted. I really appreciated what he was doing, of course. Of course.

MS. AYRES: I could also mention Melinda Wortz at Irvine, Michael Smith at the Baxter Gallery at Caltech in Pasadena, Dextra Frankel at Cal State Fullerton with their intensive exhibition design program, Betty Gold at ARCO Center, Josine Ianco-Starrells at Cal State Los Angeles and then at the Municipal Gallery.

Do you have any particular memories of their programs? Were the majority of commercial galleries in L.A. as responsive to Los Angeles artists in the 1970s as many of these places were?

MS. FELSEN: No. I don't think they were. And Josine had a remarkable energy and – but you know that makes me think right now of – I'm glad you mentioned Cal State L.A., because I think Julie Joyce is doing a wonderful job at Luckman Gallery at Cal State L.A. And of that kind of a gallery situation I think she's, you know, she's the game in town for today.

We were just at the opening of the current exhibition at – Barnsdall last week or the week before, and it was nice to be there again now that they've reopened. And there's some energy going there, but it's just not the same. Just not the same as it was in Josine's days.

MS. AYRES: But we're also talking about the 1970s.

MS. FELSEN: This is true.

MS. AYRES: And it was a different time.

MS. FELSEN: This is true.

MS. AYRES: All of this art activity was against the background of the Vietnam War and the antiwar demonstrations and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy in 1968 and Stonewall, 1969, in New York, which was the beginning of the gay and lesbian rights movement, and of course, the women's movement. Were you involved in any way in the woman's movement?

MS. FELSEN: Only secondhand. I was – like Barbara Haskell, Karen Carson, a lot of artists – Alexis Smith – were involved. But you know what? I was never invited to participate in these – [laughs] – I didn't care. But I thought it was curious that they didn't invite me. Maybe because they thought I was like a married person with children and that maybe they were different sorts –

MS. AYRES: But with a career, I mean, isn't this for you?

MS. FELSEN: Well, this was going on when I was at the museum at that time. I don't know. It's interesting that they never invited me – I never was. I never asked. If I wanted to I suppose I would have asked, but I didn't. I don't know why.

MS. AYRES: Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* opened in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979. That's one year after you opened your gallery. Were you aware of Judy Chicago? Of course, you probably were from Maurice Tuchman's show ["American Sculpture of the Sixties, LACMA, 1967], too, when she showed those early minimal pieces.

MS. FELSEN: Well, not only that. Judy was a very close friend of Elyse Grinstein, and so I saw Judy often. What – the most important thing that I remember in the early days with Judy is that she was the first person I heard who ever said anything about the Palestinians in relation to Israel. And I thought, "Ah! I'd never thought about that before." So I still remember that.

MS. AYRES: The *Dinner Party* has always been controversial. Did you get to see the reinstallation of the *Dinner Party* at the Armand Hammer Museum in 1996 along with Amelia Jones's "Sexual Politics" exhibition?

MS. FELSEN: I did indeed.

MS. AYRES: And what was your reaction?

MS. FELSEN: I was happy to leave. [Laughs.] It's always bothered me that – I have felt – I'm sorry – that Judy exploited other women for her own ego. And that's bothered me.

MS. AYRES: The actual *Dinner Party* was installed downstairs from the "Sexual Politics Museum" in this semi-

darkened room. One felt like one was entering a holy shrine, and women primarily would slowly move from place to place. I saw women crying. I saw women leaving. Do you think that's a phenomena –

MS. FELSEN: People want to believe in these things. It's like wanting to believe in George W. Bush. They want to believe in being a Republican, they want to believe that America is good and great and only does wonderful things. And I think the same thing is true with, you know, wanting to believe in the women's movement. And it's not all good, I don't think.

MS. AYRES: What did you think of the exhibition itself?

MS. FELSEN: I wasn't as – for me it wasn't as controversial as it was for many people.

MS. AYRES: For Christopher Knight, for instance.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, exactly. I mean, really, it was fine. It was okay.

MS. AYRES: Yeah, I respect Amelia and I thought the catalogue was a very, very, very good catalogue.

MS. FELSEN: She does good catalogues.

MS. AYRES: And the essays were really, really good. Hers especially. But there is always that situation in museums where people count too much on the catalogue to do the job for them. You know, if it can't go up in the gallery, we can put it in the catalogue. And I think that show suffered a little bit from that.

MS. FELSEN: Because they're conceptual and not visual.

MS. AYRES: And that the idea of starting with the categories was as if you were illustrating the categories with the art rather than developing the categories from the art, but that is just my opinion.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, it was fine.

MS. AYRES: Did you feel any pressure to increase the number of women in your gallery, because really now you show or have shown a high percentage of women: Karen Carson, Renée Petropoulos, Erika Rothenberg, Meg Cranston, Ann Preston, Joan Jonas, Marnie Weber, Laura Owens, and other artists that you have added recently. Carson was with you from the very first and Petropoulos was soon added, but when were other important women artists added – in the '80s or the '90s?

MS. FELSEN: You know, it just kind of happened. I never, ever consciously think, oh, this is a woman artist; oh, this is a man artist. I think what has happened is that I have been more interested in art by women. And it isn't – as I say, it isn't a conscious thing that happens; it's just that what the artist, that they are making, seems to be of interest to me right now. That is the only thing that I can think of because I looked around one day and I started counting, and I thought, oh, my goodness, I have more women than men for the first time, and that was a surprise to me. It just happened without my realizing it.

MS. AYRES: I'm going to ask a question that I'm unsure of because my memory may be very faulty here, in which case we will just drop it. I have a memory of an exhibition I think at LACE [Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions], maybe downtown, political exhibition where they singled out or they were counting the number of women artists in each gallery, and that your gallery at that point was singled out for not having many women artists.

MS. FELSEN: Probably.

MS. AYRES: Is that a memory that – it seemed to be unfair at the time.

MS. FELSEN: That sounds like something that the Guerrilla Girls were doing.

MS. AYRES: Yes, it was the Guerrilla Girls; it was the Guerrilla Girls.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, yeah, I think that that is probably true.

MS. AYRES: And because probably at the time it was Renée and Karen only that –

MS. FELSEN: Well, it was – who remembers? Yeah, that may be. That may be.

MS. AYRES: Maybe. Can you remember an earlier attitude to what I'm talking about – the '50s here probably – to so-called women artists, that they perhaps could not be counted upon to pursue a long-term career? They would have babies, they would get married, they weren't serious. Do you feel that women artists have complete parity

now?

MS. FELSEN: I do. Yeah, I do think that that is true. Absolutely. Well, women are so much better at multitasking I guess. [Laughter.]

MS. AYRES: Well, you know –

MS. FELSEN: And when I think of Renée , I mean, everything that she does with those twin girls – I mean, school and making art and this and that, and she manages to do it. And she is involved with this and with that and everything. If you have the energy and the wherewithal, you can do it, and it has nothing to do with whether you –

MS. AYRES: Yeah, given the times, there was a time when I think a woman had to choose between having a career or having babies and so forth, and that you didn't really mention having children, and now they are everywhere.

MS. FELSEN: Well, I think there is a different attitude about raising children these days too.

MS. AYRES: Mm-hmm. In the galleries – everywhere you go.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: CalArts opened in 1971. It takes time to build a graduate program. However, many of your artists in the 1980s, while you were still at the La Cienega Gallery, were from what might be called the great CalArts generation: Mike Kelley, Lari Pittman, Roy Dowell, Marc Pally, Jim Shaw, Tim Ebner, Mitchell Syrop, John Miller, all who received MFAs in the years more or less between 1976 and '82. Would you discuss the impact of CalArts and why it was so successful?

MS. FELSEN: Again, I think that it has to do with the faculty. And probably the strongest influences were certainly [John] Baldessari and Michael Asher, and the visiting artists that they had teaching there over the time. And this attracted the most interesting students. I remember Mike saying that when he wanted to go to grad school, he could have gone to New York, but he didn't want to live in New York. He wanted to come to California. So even though he was – you know, he is from sort of the East, being from Detroit – he came to California. And so it had – it was – UCLA was not the power that it was and Art Center was not either. It was the only game in town.

MS. AYRES: Other well-known CalArts artists from the period include Cindy Bernard, Dana Duff, Jill Giegerich, Tom Knechtel, who perhaps could have been placed in your gallery, Jim Isermann, Larry Johnson, Stephen Prina, Christopher Williams – I'm sure there were more. All of the artists I have mentioned chose to stay in Los Angeles to build their careers – and you earlier spoke of this time; it's that point of critical mass – and thus L.A. became as prominent as New York as a place of production. But did or do any of your artists have gallery representation in New York as well as Los Angeles?

MS. FELSEN: You know, right now I don't have any artists with galleries in New York – let me think – other than Joan Jonas, who of course is from New York. No. From time to time they are invited to be in exhibitions in New York. For example, Nancy Jackson is in a show at the Drawing Center right now, and that has been a wonderful thing for her. But, no, I don't have representation in New York at the moment.

MS. AYRES: Many of these CalArts graduates have chair or teaching positions now at other art schools – UCLA, Art Center and Otis, for instance. Do you attend the yearly MFA shows of these art schools? Do you have a sense of a certain direction that has been or is crucial to each school that sets them apart from each other?

MS. FELSEN: You know, I hate that thing about going to those exhibitions. I just hate the idea of it. I will go on occasion because one of my artists who teaches there says, oh, you really have to come to this because there is a certain artist I want you to see, and so I'll go. I just don't approve of the whole thing.

I did go to see the "Supersonic Show" at Art Center because that was such an extravaganza. That was a special situation with all of those art schools combined. In fact, I went a couple of times to see it. But I just – I just don't want to be part of that stampede into these graduates. I just think it's inappropriate. It bothers me a lot. And if I miss out on some artists, well, that is the way it goes.

MS. AYRES: Did the rise in the importance of the big international bi-annuals and festivals affect the kind of work being produced? Is there such a thing as festival art that seems destined only for museums?

MS. FELSEN: Now, you're talking about these big blockbuster international exhibitions like Documenta – Venice Biennales – and that sort of thing? I don't know that it does. I think what it does do is affect the market – the artist market. And it just boosts that to a level that is kind of ridiculous. And I think that is all it does. I really believe that. I have never really thought about that before but I think that that is the case.

MS. AYRES: For artists that want to work on large and dramatic scale, it certainly does provide an opportunity to experiment.

MS. FELSEN: Well, that is wonderful to do that, and my artists have certainly been in the biennales – and in Documenta and so forth, and it's wonderful, but it's just – I think the only thing that happens is – well, if an artist has been in one of these exhibitions, it just boosts the value of the work, that's all – the market value, I mean.

MS. AYRES: Were LA commercial galleries generally doing well financially in the 1980s? I am always a little unclear about the boom and bust cycles that affect the galleries so definitely. Were they showing a majority of Los Angeles artists at that time in the '80s?

MS. FELSEN: Well, some were and some weren't. I mean, there were some galleries that were going in the '80s that aren't even around, like the Comsky Gallery, for example. I don't know what happened to them. I think galleries were doing pretty well, but then the '90 crash came and then that separated the men from the boys, as they say.

MS. AYRES: [Laughs.] In 1981, LACMA devoted two simultaneous exhibitions to Los Angeles artists. Maurice Tuchman curated "Art in Los Angeles, Seventeen artists in the Sixties" [1981], an exhibition that officially anointed the artists whose work brought attention to L.A. in the '60s. Some of those artists were Larry Bell, Billy Al Bengston Wallace Bermen, Ron Davis, Joe Goode, David Hockney, Robert Irwin, Craig Kauffman, Edward Kienholz, Ed Moses, Bruce Nauman, Kenneth Price, Ed Ruscha, Peter Voulkos, and also Richard Deibenkorn, Sam Francis, and John McLaughlin.

MS. FELSEN: That is quite a list.

MS. AYRES: Is it no accident, given the disposition of the '60s, that all of these artists were men? Do you remember the demonstration on opening night when women wore masks of Maurice Tuchman's face to protest the exhibition?

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] That was great. That was great. Now, was that the same – when they had the show, also "Museum as Site"? Was that the same –

MS. AYRES: That was the same time.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, it was the same time. Mm-hmm. That was Stephanie's [Stephanie Barron] show ["The Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects", 1981].

MS. AYRES: That was Stephanie's show. Maurice Tuchman was a force in L.A. art, in the L.A. art world for about three decades. Is a position of power like that bound to be controversial?

MS. FELSEN: Well, when it's someone like Maurice Tuchman – [laughs] – it's going to be controversial. I mean, someone could be beloved too, but I mean, Maurice had such questionable operational tactics that I think that was the problem. And everybody was aware of it. And it took a long time for the Museum to do something about it. But you can't deny that his blockbuster exhibitions, as we used to call them, were quite remarkable – "The Spiritual In Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1985" [LACMA, 1986] and –

MS. AYRES: Going back to "Art and Technology."

MS. FELSEN: And "Art and Technology."

MS. AYERS: Even the first Kienholz show.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, oh, absolutely. So there were important shows that he did.

MS. AYRES: Yes. Stephanie Barron's companion exhibition to Maurice's exhibition was art in Los Angeles, "The Museum as Site – Sixteen Projects" – which seemed to sum up in 1981 the importance of non-specific – of site-specific art in the 1970s. All the installations were sited throughout the museum and in its park. Did you feel that her show was groundbreaking for the museum?

MS. FELSEN: Yes, I did. I thought it was – well, so I had how many artists did I have in the show? I had a number.

MS. AYRES: My next question is you had at least two, perhaps four artists in this exhibition – Richard Jackson, and Chris Burden, and the only two women, Karen Carson and Alexis Smith.

MS. FELSEN: That is right. So that was quite nice. And I remember that that was the first time that Chris showed his *Tale of Two Cities* [1981] piece. And my contribution to that was it was – it was a set up all of these miniature – it was like a miniature city with miniature toys and miniature everything. And it was in a room that had a rope

going across it so you weren't allowed to enter it because of all of these little tiny little things. And Chris was worried about how are people going to be able to see this? And I said, well, why don't we have some binoculars? And so that is how we did it.

MS. AYRES: That was shown again at the Newport Harbor Art Museum in Chris Burden's retrospective [1988] there. And I remember on opening night the funder, from I believe the Irvine Foundation, stood at the podium, looked to *Tale of Two Cities* and said, this installation reminds me of the growth of Irvine. And I always remembered that.

[Laughter.]

MS. FELSEN: Isn't that great? Everybody relates things to their own experience.

MS. AYRES: And it seems to me too that part of Chris's concept was that each time it's shown he expands it a bit.

MS. FELSEN: Yes.

MS. AYRES: He adds to it and expands it a bit, which is a nice idea.

But since you had four artists in this exhibition, it might be a good time to discuss these artists. We have spoken about Chris a good deal, but would you speak about the work of Richard Jackson, who is a highly respected but perhaps under-recognized artist?

MS. FELSEN: Under-recognized here, but he is one of these artists who has got more recognition in Europe. He decided some time ago that he was no longer going to show in Los Angeles because he wasn't getting the support, which is what happened to Kienholz for a while, but then that changed.

But at any rate, Richard did – he had some bitterness because he wasn't getting the kind of support that he should have gotten, and part of that was because he wasn't a schmoozer and he didn't network – and a very likeable, wonderful person. He was close friends with Bruce Nauman, and I think his work was very much influenced by Bruce, but then it started taking its own direction.

And the big standout show – we had several shows with him, but the most memorable one for me was the one called "The Big Wall," and it was called – no, it wasn't called "The Big Wall;" it was called "Big Ideas." And what he did was to have a number of canvasses that he actually made and stretched in the gallery. And I gave him the gallery for a month to do this. And then these canvasses were about maybe 20 inches by 30 – something like that – or 18 by 30 – something like that.

And then when he got ready to install the piece, what he did was he applied paint, like in an abstract way, to the surface of the canvass, put it on the floor, and then do another one and put it face – on top of the face of the other canvas while the canvas was still wet. And he continued to do this in a long row, and then building it up higher and higher and higher until it came to just like a foot from the ceiling. And it extended from one end of the gallery to the other, but left enough space so that you could walk around it. And this was called "Big Ideas," I think is what it was called. But it was fantastic.

So what he did then was to have an iron gate at the entrance to this particular gallery space. And I had strict instructions from him that I wasn't to allow William Wilson [reviewer at the *L.A. Times*] to come in and see the show because he had not reviewed him before, and if he came to the gallery I wasn't allowed to let him. And so as it turned out, Bill wasn't – never came to the show anyway, so it didn't matter. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Right. Did that piece precede or follow the piece he did for LACMA?

MS. FELSEN: No, the LACMA piece came later because then he decided to do it as a ball.

MS. AYRES: Then he did it as a ball.

MS. FELSEN: Because it was placed at the – on the floor of the atrium, so you could see it from above, which was quite wonderful.

MS. AYRES: And Alexis Smith, she had a separate room in the gallery.

MS. FELSEN: That is right.

MS. AYRES: In the museum.

MS. FELSEN: In the museum, right. That was one of her big – when she was just beginning to do these big

installation pieces.

MS. AYRES: Is she an example of an artist who is now represented by another gallerist that you still are close to and felt it was best for her to do that?

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I do. I felt that. I really believe that. She decided – I mean, we tried working together and having two simultaneous shows, but that was just too hard on her. And so she came to me and decided that it was really best for her if she would go to the Margo Leavin Gallery, and that would be more suitable for her. I believe that, you know, if this is what you want to do and if you feel that this would work best for you, that is what you should do. And she has been happy ever since, I'm sure.

MS. AYRES: And you are close to Margo too.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah.

MS. AYRES: Have been good friends for a long time.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yeah.

MS. AYRES: She and Betty Asher and Patty Faure are probably – when I asked you about gallerists of your generation who you respect, I would have expected you to name those three at least.

MS. FELSEN: Sure. There were difficulties in getting on with Margo, so you have to kind of be careful. She is a little controlling. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Unlike you.

[Laughter.]

MS. FELSEN: Oh, no. I'm not like that at all.

MS. AYRES: No.

And Karen Carson, we both remember her huge banner hanging from the Wilshire Boulevard facade of the museum.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

MS. AYRES: She was with you from the very beginning and she is with you now. And she is certainly an artist whose – I don't quite want to use "style" but her work has changed dramatically over the years while in no way not expressing her core self, I think.

MS. FELSEN: That is true. I hadn't really thought about that, except there was that period where – before she was married when she was doing those great big wonderful pieces when I was at the Santa Monica Boulevard space. And a lot of the smaller drawings had to do with feminine issues, and I think there – she showed more of herself there. Now –

MS. AYRES: But less of herself when she was doing the very abstract work.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly, exactly. But she –

MS. AYRES: Which that banner was on the side of the building.

MS. FELSEN: Absolutely, yeah.

MS. AYRES: I'm sorry; I interrupted you.

MS. FELSEN: That was more of an intellectual approach I think. She was dealing with issues of painting, and that is really what it was about.

MS. AYRES: Which was odd to have something dealing with painting issues hanging as a banner outside a museum. One of her current works would have been much more appropriate, don't you think?

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, that is true.

MS. AYRES: Karen had told me that they had given her the wrong size and the banner was supposed to be much larger, and maybe that would have made a difference too.

LACMA's modern and contemporary wing was not added until 1985, and of course its curatorial staff was then expanded. MOCA opened in 1986, although the temporary contemporary, now the Geffen Contemporary, was established in 1983. Has LACMA continued to serve Los Angeles artists well? How would you compare LACMA's programs to MOCA's in this regard? And I am asking about a sweep of time from the mid-'80s to the present.

MS. FELSEN: LACMA is okay. It could be a lot better, I think. Even their permanent collection shows that – and a lot, like, the art that they buy, the younger art, I think that comes out of the funding from the Modern and Contemporary Art Council, the Here and Now Committee. I don't think they're really good strong choices. I don't think they have good guidance there somehow. I'm a little disappointed in that. I think it's a weak – those are weak selections that they are making.

Their exhibition program – except for this recent Lynn Zelevansky extravaganza, which I think is remarkable, I'm not so happy with what they have been doing. I don't think there has been anything that is a standout. MOCA – I mean, MOCA used to be a lot stronger in terms of the programming and in the exhibitions. I think the Beyond Minimalism – not Beyond Minimalism. What is Ann's [Ann Goldstein] show called – Minimal – The Future –

MS. AYRES: Future.

MS. FELSEN: "Future of Minimalism?" Or no, that can't be right.

MS. AYRES: Why do we both not remember –

MS. FELSEN: Anyway, it's "Ann's show."

MS. AYRES: "Ann's show."

MS. FELSEN: It's just like, you know that – when Henry Geldzhaler was at that Met and he did his famous New York scenes show. It was called Henry's Show ["New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970" Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1969-1970]. So this is Ann's show.

MS. AYRES: A Minimalist's Future ["A Minimalist Future? Art as Object 1958-1968" Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California, 2004].

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, something like that. Isn't it terrible we don't remember that? But I'm not so crazy about some of the recent exhibitions that MOCA had. However, my favorite exhibition that has been happening in the museums in town is that – recently is that Lee Bontecou show that Elizabeth Smith did, which I thought was extraordinary [at the Hammer Museum].

MS. AYRES: Extraordinary show.

In some ways – well, of course LACMA is a generalist museum, but we were talking specifically about the modern contemporary, which got such a boost in 1985, and –

MS. FELSEN: Sure.

MS. AYRES: In some ways I think museums serve artists – and LACMA can do this better than MOCA – by some of their shows that are historical shows that get everybody excited – the "Soutine Show", the "Arthur Dove Show". And I think – and I'm not talking about the big impressionist shows or "Van Gogh shows". And I think sometimes LACMA doesn't get enough credit for providing that kind of visual richness, not only to the general public but to artists. The recent show that had to do with the construction of race ["Inventing Race: Casta Painting and Eighteenth-Century Mexico" LACMA, April 4, 2004 through August 8, 2004], for instance, was a phenomenally interesting show, and many artists went to it. But in terms of actually showing Los Angeles artists in big retrospectives there has been Mike Kelley, Lari Pittman, Bill Viola – I'm sure I'm missing, but not many.

MS. FELSEN: Bill Viola – was it with LACMA?

MS. AYRES: Yes.

MS. FELSEN: It was.

MS. AYRES: But not very many. But then again –

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I mean, we're talking about 20 years.

MS. AYRES: And these are all artists who were already – I mean, that show didn't make their career. They had that show because their career was already established. That is clear.

MS. FELSEN: And then the Kelley show was organized by the Whitney, not by LACMA.

MS. AYRES: Well, for instance, MOCA's "Alexis Smith show" was not organized by MOCA either; it was organized by the Whitney.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: MOCA has had three directors, Pontus Hulten, Richard Koshalek, and now Jeremy Strick. Would you speak a little bit about the tenure of each of these men?

MS. FELSEN: Pontus, well, he was here such a short time. It was during the early formative days so it doesn't really matter. Richard – well, Richard had an enormous amount of energy when he was at the Museum, and he did a lot in raising money and getting some energy and interest in the Museum, and people, boy, this is the place, and everything, you know. Richard came to my gallery – in the 20 years or so that he was there, he was in my gallery once. Jeremy, on the other hand – this is how I gauge the value of the director.

MS. AYRES: The importance of the director. [Laughter.]

MS. FELSEN: Well, what else can I say? He has been to my – I think he probably sees just about every one of my shows, because I guess he is primarily a curator and he cares. And doesn't just come to look, like Rusty Powell used to do, just to – he really looks at the show. He spends some time looking and he asks questions and so forth. And I appreciate that and I'm sure the artists appreciate that a great deal.

In terms of what is happening with the museum now, I already talked about that, so I don't know if that is because of him or not.

MS. AYRES: The museum curators of course develop the exhibitions, and there have been many memorable exhibitions at MOCA. Can you speak of the contributions made by Julia Brown and Mary Jane Jacob and Paul Schimmel?

MS. FELSEN: Julia was the one who really showed interest in Mike Kelley. And when they got this grant from the El Paso Natural Gas, or whatever it was, she knew that it was Mike Kelley that they had to buy, among other artists. And so she bought a significant amount of work and they exhibited it and it's been part of the permanent collection. She was – she was interesting.

I think Mary Jane was problematic. I think she was focused elsewhere and didn't really feel like she belonged here. And consequently it was not California-centric; it was elsewhere, and I think that is why she didn't last.

Now, Paul coming – we already knew him from his being at Newport Harbor Art Museum, where he had already done some wonderful shows. And of course his big early show was "Helter Skelter" ["Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s" 1992]. And artists are still talking to me – I mean, as recently as this week people have been talking to me about the importance of "Helter Skelter."

MS. AYRES: Yes, I think Paul Schimmel has had a tremendous influence on the respect that Los Angeles has garnered internationally and nationally. There is of course his "Out of Actions" exhibition ["Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979", Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998], which was an extraordinary exhibition, and "Helter Skelter". But I am thinking of less obviously spectacular shows, shows like his Newport Harbor exhibition, "The Interpretive Link" ["The Interpretive Link: Abstract Surrealism into Abstract Expressionism, Works on Paper", Newport Harbor Museum, 1986] –

MS. FELSEN: Absolutely.

MS. AYRES: – which had an impact on artists such as Lari Pittman and Roy Dowell. And "Hand-Painted Pop," which was a collaboration with – [Donna De Salvo, "Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955-1962," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1992-1993]

MS. FELSEN: Well, Paul was very smart because – I don't have to tell you this – but he decided when he wanted to do "Interpretive Link" that rather than getting second-rate paintings by these particular artists, he could get first rate works on paper. And I thought that was a brilliant idea. And that is one of the reasons it was such a great show.

MS. AYRES: I also loved his small but perfect show on Arshile Gorky series of similar paintings. I mean, that is a brilliant, smart idea to do too, to pick a series and show all of the drawings around that.

MS. FELSEN: No, you're right. He is very good with historical stuff.

MS. AYRES: But, again, a powerful curator has his detractors as well as his supporters. We all have defects. What

are Schimmel's?

MS. FELSEN: What are his defects? I don't think he is always open about things. I think he is kind of prejudiced in particular directions. But, you know, I think this is true of many curators. They have a particular – you know of a particular curator, that this curator is going to be interested in seeing minimalism – like Ann Goldstein could be associated with minimalism, for example. And I think that he is not willing to think about new things as readily as he might have done 20 years ago. And I think that is probably what happens with curators.

MS. AYRES: Speaking of Ann Goldstein, who we all admire, and her conceptual and minimal art interests, do you think it's a strength for a museum to have a curator with a passionate interest in one area of art?

MS. FELSEN: If it's a big enough museum so that they can afford different points of view.

MS. AYRES: Is MOCA a big enough museum?

MS. FELSEN: No, it is not. I think – I still am not clear what Connie Butler's focus is so I don't really know. And Michael Darling doesn't seem to have a very strong voice there. So it's really Paul and Ann.

MS. AYRES: Well, what about – what about Julie Lazar? What did you think – I believe it must have been Jeremy Strick's decision to collapse the video department into the other curatorial divisions.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I think that was a mistake because Julie did some remarkable shows there, remarkable things. And in fact, I am so pleased that she was able to do the Pat O'Neill show, which is currently at the Santa Monica Museum. And in fact she came to me and she said, you know, Pat does not have a gallery; would you be interested in representing him? I said, well, me? – because I didn't have that much familiarity with his work. And she said, well, then you can come and learn about it. [Laughter.]

And this is – I'm so flattered. So that is what I'm going to do. I'm going to have a show with him in February. But she did a remarkable job with that show. I mean, he is known primarily for his avant-garde films, but nobody – a lot of people didn't know about his graphic work and his sculpture and that kind of thing. And that is a very complex body of work covering 40 years, and all the different ranges of things that he did. And I think she did a remarkable job and the catalogue is phenomenal.

MS. AYRES: But do you think it's reasonable to expect the other curators to have the kind of specialized knowledge that a video historian has?

MS. FELSEN: Well, that's a problem. And what about photography? I don't think anybody there really knows about photography. So that is a problem. So – I don't know. It's – you know, the old idea of the Metropolitan or even LACMA has these different departments, and I think that they wanted to do away with that. But I don't know if that is such a smart idea because there is too much to know, and how can somebody be an expert on video and painting and photography and performance?

MS. AYRES: Even though we're in a situation where some, if not many, artists touch on all of these aspects in their own lives?

MS. FELSEN: Yes, that is true.

MS. AYRES: Then do we need a special curator for artists that touch on all of these aspects?

MS. FELSEN: A multi-task curator. [Laughter.]

MS. AYRES: I believe that Connie Butler's title is probably associated curator of the Marcia Weisman works on paper collection.

MS. FELSEN: Well, that is what it started out as being, but is it still?

MS. AYRES: I don't know. But I think she has done some very thoughtful exhibitions. There was a drawing show that she did that was terrifically interesting that showed early Eva Hesse drawings and was very, very important to the artists in L.A.

MS. FELSEN: I know, but I have a bone to pick with Connie.

MS. AYRES: Do you want to pick it now?

MS. FELSEN: Yes, I'll pick it. So what about this feminist show that she is working on – you know, the feminist movement and so forth? And did she ever talk to Karen Carson or did she ever talk to me about Karen Carson, who was very much involved with this? So I think she doesn't know this. And if you don't know – I mean, she is

very young, comparatively speaking, and if you don't know this, you go out and you find out about it, or you ask people.

MS. AYRES: On that note, you must have been tremendously happy to have Karen's Zipper piece in the Lynn Zelevansky show.

MS. FELSEN: Well, this is brilliant. And because – we just happened to have it hanging in my office one day, and Lynn, who of course didn't know this early work of Karen's because she didn't live here when Karen made that in 1971 or '2, whenever that was, and she never forgot seeing that. And so she came to me a year before she did this show and said that she thinks the museum should have that in their collection. And they bought it, which was a fantastic move.

MS. AYRES: So it could be as accidental as seeing a work in a gallery director's office. This certainly shows the importance of curators getting out to the all of the shows.

MS. FELSEN: The LACMA curators are very good, very, very good about coming out.

MS. AYRES: Alma Ruiz at MOCA specializes in artists who live south of the border and has had some interesting shows. You have probably answered this. But do you think that MOCA does a good job in balancing its exhibitions? There is so much to show even though their chronological focus is limited.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Yeah, I think they are trying to do that. And as you say, there is so much to show. I think it's a good thing that they are doing this – what Alma is doing. I think that is important.

MS. AYRES: Is the – shall I call it the "main museum" – [laughs] – it is large enough for them to keep up a great deal of their permanent collection on a regular basis?

MS. FELSEN: Well, they have no choice. I mean, what are they going to do about it if it isn't big enough? I mean, a museum is never big enough.

MS. AYRES: Well, Newport Harbor would have their permanent collection show every year. So once a year you would get a chance to see at least a good portion of the collection. And I think the curators at MOCA try to do that with their shows too.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I think they do.

MS. AYRES: Speaking of Newport, how important was the role of the Newport Harbor Art Museum in the 1980s when Kevin Consey was director and Paul Schimmel was chief curator?

MS. FELSEN: I think it was terribly important. In fact, I was just down there for the opening of the California biennale the night before last, and I didn't even remember how to go because it had been so many years since I had been going down there. The reason I went is because I have an artist in the show – Kaz Oshiro. But I used to go down there on a very regular basis because there were exhibitions that I was interested in seeing, and that has not been the case in recent years, but now hopefully that will change.

MS. AYRES: This may be a trivial question, but it's kind of a marketing question. Did you have an opinion concerning the change of the museum's name from Newport Harbor to Orange County? We might as well make that clear that you went to the Orange County Museum of Art.

MS. FELSEN: That is right.

MS. AYRES: Do you think the change was a harbinger of a change of directions in Museum policies? It happened after Paul left and after Kevin left.

MS. FELSEN: Wasn't it changed because of the potential merger between Laguna?

MS. AYRES: No, I think it was – you may know more about that than I do, but I think it was changed before those talks came about.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, I see.

MS. AYRES: I'm not sure. You may know more than I do.

MS. FELSEN: I thought that –

MS. AYRES: Let's go with you then.

MS. FELSEN: I don't know. I don't know, but I thought that the plan was that Laguna Art Museum would merge with the Newport Harbor Art Museum, and therefore be called the Orange County Museum. But for whatever reason that didn't work out so Laguna remained Laguna but maybe Orange County – they had already changed it or something – I don't know, I don't know. But I thought it was because of that potential merger.

MS. AYRES: I had the feeling too, but maybe this was more PR than anything else, that there was an interest in giving the general public the perception that the museum belonged – Orange County is a huge place – and that there was something so-called elitist about it being the Newport Harbor Art Museum. But that would be true of the Laguna Beach Museum too. This might have been an argument before or after the fact. I'm not sure.

MS. AYRES: Although Schimmel started the Newport biannual series, the museum continued them after he left to become chief curator of MOCA. To jump right back to the present, as you just mentioned, you've just returned from an opening at the Orange County Museum, an opening of the California biennale. What is the function of such a biennale, situated as it is in Orange County? Is it worth doing? How was this one?

MS. FELSEN: It's okay. I was a little disappointed. I mean, I have to go down and see it a second time. It didn't seem to me as strong as it could have been. They were – the artists were from also the Bay Area or from other parts, not just Southern California. There were artists there whose work I did not know, was not familiar with. I think it's a good idea to do. Why not? I think it's a very good idea to do. It could have been stronger I think.

MS. AYRES: Lari Pittman, Marc Pally and Mike Kelley, all had early exhibitions at Newport Harbor Art Museum. Were they with you at the time, and would you care to discuss their work and why it excited you? Perhaps we could start with Lari Pittman.

MS. FELSEN: Actually, when I went to Lari's studio, it was through a friend of his who suggested I should see him. But Lari, instead of the usual thing – you talk on the phone and you make arrangements and then you drive to the artist's studio. But no, Lari said, I will come and pick you up. And I said, okay. I thought maybe he thinks I'm an old lady or something. So he came, he picked me up, and we went, and then he drove me back. So this was 1982. He had already met with Paul Schimmel, and Paul had expressed interest in his work and told him that he would like to have this little show with him.

And so – but I'm looking at this work and it's the strangest work that I had ever seen. It was quite different than what it is today. I mean, it would still be recognizable, at least as his work, but very different. And I thought, this is very peculiar work. But I was so interested in him and how he talked about the work. I usually can make up my mind at the first visit, but in this case I could not. And I said I would just like to think about it. And I called him up after a few days and said I would like to have another visit, and he said fine. And it was with the second visit that I decided. And it was based on him rather than on the paintings that I decided to do it so – because I knew – I just knew.

MS. AYRES: Well, when you say the early work was different, you're saying that from our eyes today it would look prettier or more decorative or –

MS. FELSEN: But it was –

MS. AYRES: But it still had that edge –

MS. FELSEN: It wasn't pretty.

MS. AYRES: I had that kind of edge.

MS. FELSEN: It wasn't pretty. It wasn't pretty in the pretty sense.

MS. AYRES: No, it was – I think it looks pretty in retrospect maybe as much art does that is difficult. It was strange – it was a strange beauty.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, very strange. Mm-hmm.

MS. AYRES: Speaking of Lari, there was an interesting show at – was it done at the Armand Hammer Museum, that Liz Brown did on Lari's works on paper.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, that was his works on paper. That is the one she did at Santa Barbara, where she was the curator[University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara]

MS. AYRES: Yeah, at Santa Barbara and it was open at the Armand Hammer then it went to –

MS. FELSEN: Because what had happened is she had come to me and said she wanted very much to do a Lari Pittman exhibition. And I said, well, LACMA has already spoken for having the show. I said, why don't you do

works on paper? So that is what she decided to do, and it worked out perfectly.

MS. AYRES: It's a beautiful show I thought.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, it was great.

MS. AYRES: This is another kind of curious, perhaps trivial thing. But it was interesting to see how many of the early works on paper were in collections by artists, that they were either purchased or most likely trades, because you could work out a whole circle of artists from this kind of collecting information.

MS. FELSEN: True.

MS. AYRES: And then at some point, probably in the mid-'80s, they dropped out because his work was no longer the kind of work that could be either traded or afforded.

MS. FELSEN: Right, right, right.

MS. AYRES: Do you ever watch that – watch that when you go up –

MS. FELSEN: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

MS. AYRES: When you go to shows like say even Lynn Zelevansky's show, how conscious are you of the collections from which they have come?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, I look. That is always interesting to me. That is important to me.

MS. AYRES: How many are from museums? How many are from private collections?

MS. FELSEN: From private collections, and which museums, and which private collectors? That is an important thing for me to know.

MS. AYRES: We talked a little bit about Lari Pittman's work. Mike Kelley I think you have spoken about already. Marc Pally, who was in your gallery fairly early and for a good duration of time, is he an example of an artist who was better off somewhere else or with no gallery at all? Because he – how did he leave your gallery?

MS. FELSEN: He just came to me one day and he said he has decided he's going to leave the gallery. And I said, okay. [Laughs.] But do you know the rest of it?

MS. AYRES: No.

MS. FELSEN: Some time has passed. I have lost track of it. It is a year or two years. He called me up again. He said he would like to come in and see me. I said, okay. And he said he would like to come back. And I said, Mark, I feel as if you have never left. [Laughs.] So that is what happens when we are – so we are scheduled for another show.

MS. AYRES: You're scheduled for another show. I'm so pleased. I'm so pleased.

MS. FELSEN: The same thing happened with Marnie, by the way.

MS. AYRES: Marnie Weber.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm.

MS. AYRES: The Santa Monica Museum of Art opened in 1988 with Thomas Rhoads as its founding director. This museum is really a museum without a collection, a sort of construct for exhibiting fairly recent art as well as for experimental projects. Tom started the Art in the Raw series, which was presented while the museum, then located on Main Street in Santa Monica, was being rehabbed. He followed this with the Artist Project series, which really gave a tremendous number of L.A. artists a chance to develop large installations. At least two of your artists participated, Meg Cranston and Mitchell Syrop. Were they with your gallery at the time? Do you remember their installations at the Santa Monica Museum?

MS. FELSEN: Meg was not with me yet, but Mitchell was. And of course I remember. With Meg's, it was the eggshells.

MS. AYRES: Yeah, the tower.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, because it had formerly been an egg place, whatever it was. And Mitchell – well, Mitchell was always an interesting character. So, yeah, I remember it very well.

MS. AYRES: There were a series of three curators at Santa Monica Museum of Art: Noriko Gamblin, Karen Moss, and Carole Ann Klonarides. Unless you wish to comment specifically about their programs, I'll ask instead a general question about Los Angeles curators. How often do curators leave their desk and their research and get around to the L.A. galleries? You say that the LACMA curators are really good about that. Is it true of almost all curators in Los Angeles?

MS. FELSEN: No, less so with MOCA. Ann Goldstein would come often, but when she was having this minimalist show, of course I understood that she was too busy to come around. She has been coming around lately so much, but she sees I would say about 80 percent of our shows. Let's see, the Hammer – Jamie comes around pretty often I think.

MS. AYRES: Russell Ferguson?

MS. FELSEN: Russell comes around too. He is always so quiet I forget that he comes, but he comes.

MS. AYRES: The Santa Monica Museum has long since moved to Bergamot Station, and thus is a neighbor of yours. When Tom resigned, the new director came from the East Coast; that is, from Philadelphia, the Moore College of Art and Design, and inevitably there has been a new direction to the museum with the tenure of Elsa Longhauser. Is it successful?

MS. FELSEN: I think they are doing okay. Mm-hmm. I am certainly happy with their current Pat O'Neill exhibition. And the fact that they are open to guest curators and – like, the Michael Duncan, Kim McConnell show last year, and with a nice catalogue. Yeah, I think they are doing fine. And also Lisa Melandri – associate – is also very good. Yeah, I think they are doing okay.

MS. AYRES: What about the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena, which was originally the education department of the Pasadena Art Museum? It became the Armory Center in 1989 when it moved to Raymond Street. Do you follow Jay Belloli's programming?

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I go there occasionally when there is something of interest. I think it could be stepped up a bit I think. I would like to see a little more activity there.

MS. AYRES: Well, we have gotten a bit ahead of ourselves. I would like to go back to your gallery and its move after 12 years in the La Cienega space to a new space in Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood and that seems like a good place to stop.

MS. FELSEN: Okay.

[Audio break.]

MS. AYRES: Hello, Rosamund. We're back this second day of the interview. This is October the 11th, Monday. We left off yesterday after a fairly full discussion of your gallery on La Cienega. And I want to ask you why you decided to move from a gallery that was, as you say, really beloved by many, most of the L.A. art community. And in itself, even before you moved into the gallery had its own rich history in relationship to the Los Angeles art scene. Why move?

MS. FELSEN: Well, it was too small. The office situation was – as I mentioned before, it had originally been a kitchen. And here was the kitchen sink and here was my desk and my assistant's desk. And there was a closet where we kept a file and the parking there was terrible. And the roof leaked where the beautiful skylights were. And in fact, I remember we had one time – it was leaking so badly that we had to bring a trash barrel to catch the water. [Laughs.]

So it was a rickety kind of building. It was very, very difficult to leave. In addition to it having beautiful gallery space, there was this wonderful charming patio, and I have never been able to have that since. So I wanted to stay in the general area. So we found this building on Santa Monica Boulevard, just off of La Cienega, that had been the studio of a commercial photographer whose name was Tom Kelley. And he was famous because he was the one who photographed the famous Marilyn Monroe calendar photograph. And so there was some sort of special aura about the building.

And we spruced it up and put some new skylights in. And it was probably twice the size of the space we had. We had a little parking area in the back, and it was quite nice. It was very expensive. It was considerably more expensive than rent was and then what we had been paying. But times were good. So we felt that that is what we wanted to do and we did it.

MS. AYRES: You said we. Did you have an architect or designer help you with the building?

MS. FELSEN: The architect was Greenstein-Daniels, Elyse Greenstein and Jeff Daniels. And they did work on the

design and they were – they understood completely, having experience with the art world and what galleries should look like. And so they were the ones that I asked to do it.

MS. AYRES: I remember the light being wonderful in that space too. Obviously that is a real consideration of yours beyond the lighting – fixture lighting of an exhibition.

MS. FELSEN: This is true; this is true. I am very conscious of the quality of light, particularly with paintings where here an artist is struggling away with color, and you come in and put some odd-ball lights in there that completely – I mean, you can have a red painting and it will become brown. And even though not all artists paint under natural light conditions, they know the kind of color, they know how they want it to look. And so natural light is the most neutral under which it can be shown. So that is why I like natural light.

MS. AYRES: Just a little tangent here. When I was at Otis, the vice president insisted over and over again that I use florescent lighting in the gallery, which I successfully resisted. But I notice that it seems to be a trend in Europe now to use florescent light, which might have something to do with installation art and other kinds of art, but would you ever show a painting under florescent light?

MS. FELSEN: I have actually done it because the space on La Cienega had – mostly it was natural light. But on dark days or if you were open in the evenings, which we weren't very often, but in the wintertime, openings are at the end of the day – when Larry Gagosian had the space, he had put in some indirect florescent lighting. So it wasn't directly on the art works but reflected onto the ceiling and then that reflected down. But in the most small little space that we used for drawings – had florescent lighting in it.

It started in Europe and now it's – some of the newer galleries have started using it here I think for economical reasons. We have always used –

MS. AYRES: Economical and ecological probably too.

MS. FELSEN: Probably. And we have always used track lighting because of the flexibility. It is a distraction unless you have a very high ceiling like we do now. And I don't – I'm not really happy about using tracks but I think it's – hopefully people are looking at the art works and not the ceiling. So I can't worry too much about that. But there are gels that can be put on florescent tubes so that we can control it somewhat. But there is now flexibility.

MS. AYRES: It is important to a gallery, so it is reasonable for us to discuss this I think. [Laughs.] Sometimes a double system of florescents and incandescent works because of the installation period and you can work on the florescents to begin with.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. Actually, in installation periods, we don't have any lights at all. We're just using natural light.

MS. AYRES: If you have that kind of natural light available to you and it's not – I remember a particularly striking large-scale installation by Jason Rhoades, all in yellow, and not exactly a scatter piece because there appeared to be some organizing logic to it. Would you describe that piece and the long, long talk he gave about it that took on the aspects of a performance piece?

MS. FELSEN: Well, Jason was inspired by the building. When I first took over that building on Santa Monica Boulevard, it was a very dingy gray. And I thought this has got to go. So I went across the street and looked up and down the neighborhood, and tried to decide what color I wanted the building to be. And Frank Lloyd at that time, who was doing construction work before he was in the gallery business, was my contractor. And his old yellow Ford pickup was parked in the driveway, my little parking area, and I thought that is the perfect color.

And so I matched Frank's truck to the paint and that was the color of the building. So Jason loved this building and he decided that the yellow was perfect. And it just happened to be very close to the color of yellow legal paper, legal pads. And so Jason – you're right, Jason was not a scatter artist. He is really a formalist. And he decided that he was going to work in the history of this building to this whole Marilyn Monroe thing. Everything in the exhibition was made either with cardboard or foam core, or tyvek or – covered with this yellow legal paper, and various objects and so forth.

But as you walked through, he wanted it to look as if it was like an IKEA showroom. And you would walk through and here would be, like, bookshelves. And then he would have something up against the wall on a shelf that was like his Donald Judd homage, and then there was all of these art historical references. And a dining table and a bedroom set, which was supposed to be Marilyn Monroe's bedroom set when she lived on Doheny – which was not far from there, and the washer and dryer, and all of these different things.

So as he walked through and described everything, in the background of each of these pieces, it was indeed like a performance. And, you know, we sold almost every single piece in that show, which was remarkable. And it

was –

MS. AYRES: Given the ephemeral quality of it, but it was right at the beginning I think of the interest in what I would call a Home-Depot aesthetic as opposed to a flee-market or a thrift-store aesthetic.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. That is true. And it's interesting what happened. So all of these people, these collectors who bought all of these works loved the pieces but then they decided they can't live with this. So they said what are we going to do with this? And I said, well, you should make these a gift to a museum. And the perfect place was MOCA. And of course Paul Schimmel was delighted to have these things.

MS. AYRES: Well, later when Paul showed it at MOCA, the entire installation was roped off and one could no longer walk through or around it. Is that inevitable with installations of ephemeral material that go into collections? I think Barry Sloane bought one and Lari had one. I don't know who else did. But it was such a disappointment to see it that way.

MS. FELSEN: I suspect – my memory is not so sharp about this. But I think it might have had something to do with the fire department actually. Because where they had placed it, there was only one entrance, and it was also the exit. There was no exit on the other side. And I think that that was the rule of the fire department I think. Does that sound right?

MS. AYRES: It is certainly possible. But it also would have been a serious insurance issue with collectors, because walking through that stuff, it must have been very easy to brush up against things.

MS. FELSEN: So many of these pieces were already owned by the museum as well, as it happened.

MS. AYRES: Well, that would be a problem for them, too.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, exactly.

MS. AYRES: Most people in the art world are aware of the aesthetic value and financial value of work made of what looks like ephemeral or non-art material. But there is always somebody who is, perhaps even offended by that. I think a museum is very careful about that.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm.

MS. AYRES: So who knows.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly. Well, we are all used to that.

MS. AYRES: Yes. [Laughter.] The Santa Monica Boulevard's space was rather short-lived, perhaps only a year's duration.

MS. FELSEN: Four years actually.

MS. AYRES: Four years duration. Oh, I'm so glad to be corrected. I don't – four years went so fast. Do you care to touch on your financial difficulties at the time and some serious problems with some of your artists briefly?

MS. FELSEN: Sure. This was – as I say, this was a very expensive place and it just was unfortunate that we had done this move just before the big art market crash. And things became very, very difficult financially. So, let's see – I started – I didn't really have too much difficulty with the artists at that time. They seemed to be quite sympathetic and understanding of the situation.

But when I decided that it was time to move into a lesser expensive space, when Bergamot Station was getting organized – actually, Patricia Faure – was one of the galleries there and she was trying to talk me into going there. And what really attracted me most was the – I would be paying one-third of the rent that I was paying. I mean, I didn't have – I had 4,400-square feet on Santa Monica Boulevard. Bergamot Station Gallery is 3,600-squre feet. That is plenty of room.

MS. AYRES: Does that include office space and storage?

MS. FELSEN: That is the whole space, yes. That is whole space.

No sooner did I make the decision to move there than I got a letter from Lari Pittman to tell me that he decided to leave the gallery, which was an absolute huge disappointment to me. I resorted to tears actually. It was just happening – everything was just – I just got this letter. It was the first one – when I first started getting mail at Bergamot. And we hadn't even opened yet. We were just finishing up construction. And needless to say there is a lot of stress and wondering whether I'm making the right decision and getting things organized and set up.

And here comes this letter telling me this. And I reacted much more emotionally than I would have thought I would have.

But I was not terribly surprised. I had seen – I had felt that there were signs that this was going to happen. I felt that I was being excluded somewhat. And he was getting ready to have a show at that time. He was with Jay Gorney Gallery in New York. And he – I felt – it was interesting because I felt that he hadn't invited me to come to see the work before it went. And he felt that I hadn't asked to come and see the work. So it was clear to me that he wanted to leave.

And when we are on the verge of doing something difficult, sometimes we make excuses, you know: Well, I thought this and you thought that and whatever. Nonetheless, that's what happened, and so that was kind of the beginning of a series of artists leaving the gallery. Roy followed shortly after, Roy Dowell, and Tom Knechtel also.

Then Paul McCarthy came in and sat down with me and told me that, look, this is what he has to do. And I said that's fine, I understand. Paul was on the verge of going – making this big transition into making these major, expensive fabricated works, and he was getting support from a European gallery, Hauser and Wirth, and also from Luhring Augustine in New York. I was not in a position to be able to do that, and he was right to do that, and it was the smart thing for him to do.

Well, then Mike Kelley came in and talked to me, and he felt that he – you know, all the artists that he had been seen in context with were no longer there, and that he felt that he needed to leave, too. But I think money, of course, was a big consideration there as well.

It's interesting because I still feel very close to Mike. And I don't see Paul so much, but I see Mike occasionally and we're still very friendly. But the relationship with Lari never got back to where it was originally, which is really too bad, and that's what happens sometimes.

MS. AYRES: My feeling is that, although it might have been incited by some financial struggles that you were having at the time in terms of paying Mike and Lari, that many of these artists were at a place in their career where they might have been leaving anyway, but that their relationship with you was so close, and in some ways admired you so much that this was, well, a real issue, perhaps just something that could motivate or move that might have come about anyway. Am I making this sound too –

MS. FELSEN: Well, those were very nice words for you to say, but –

MS. AYRES: Paul was making larger pieces. Mike was –

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Lari was showing in New York.

MS. FELSEN: The difficulty – I didn't have as much difficulty with Mike and Paul. I understood where they were, and they were so nice and kind about it.

MS. AYRES: And Mike actually helped you in terms of finding a buyer for –

MS. FELSEN: He did. Yes, he did.

MS. AYRES: – some Gemini prints.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, he did. He did.

MS. AYRES: So you could pay him.

MS. FELSEN: That's right. That's right. And Mike is a very thoughtful, generous, kind person. So it was – it's a case of people handling things differently, that's all, I guess.

MS. AYRES: So when you moved to Bergamot Station, although these people left, not immediately, but close to the first year I would think –

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. Yes, they did. Mm-hmm.

MS. AYRES: – it was really a new start.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, it was.

MS. AYRES: You had to – in some sense this is a cliché – but not exactly reinvent yourself, but reinvent the

gallery and the focus of the gallery. You had all these high-powered men who – many of whom were beginning to have national and international reputations. Did you think seriously about the artists – of course you did – the artists that were going to replace them and the fact that you might be going in a new direction?

MS. FELSEN: Yes. Again, I never, ever in the whole period of having a gallery, I never really thought, well, now I'm going to look for such-and-such kind of an artist or a male artist or a black artist or this kind of artist or that kind of artist. I would just always have to respond to the work in a particular way and feel that it was something that I could learn from, something that everybody else could learn from, and something that was meaningful for me. And that's how I still, to this day, continue to look at art. And as we mentioned yesterday, without consciously doing it I seemed to be inviting more women artists to the gallery than before.

MS. AYRES: Yes, I think we – I've continually read lists of all the women artists: Karen Carson, Renée Petropoulos, Erika Rothenberg, Meg Cranston, Ann Preston, Joan Jonas, Marnie Weber, Laura Owens, Nancy –

MS. FELSEN: – Jackson.

MS. AYRES: – Jackson. And there must be others.

MS. FELSEN: Paula. Pauline Stella Sanchez.

MS. AYRES: Pauline Stella Sanchez. That's a remarkable group of powerful women artists. We can't possibly talk about them all. We've talked a little bit about Erika Rothenberg in connection to her – loosely-said – political art. I'm very curious about Ann Preston.

MS. FELSEN: Now Ann Preston went through a very difficult period. She came to me – she had originally shown with the Pence Gallery, and then that gallery closed, and then she came to me and said that she wanted to show with me. And I'd always had great admiration for her. She's so brilliant and her work is so unique. So – but it's sculpture, and I don't show a lot of sculpture. Well, I do sort of, but not representational sculpture the way hers is. And –

MS. AYRES: Although that's misleading, too.

MS. FELSEN: That is – it is misleading because it isn't all representational, but – for more reasons than one.

But anyway, so I started showing her and we had a few shows. And then, when – oh, we had a magnificent show, our first show at the Bergamot Station space. And these were all heads of – they were self-portraits, but she made herself look like – it was ambiguous whether she was male or female – and then there were different facial expressions expressing different emotions: anger, sadness, happiness and so forth. And it was just a wonderful installation. She's so brilliant.

But what happened to Ann is she developed breast cancer, and this was something that she had to deal with. And the no sooner did she recover from this then she has a studio in, oh, the boondocks there, out past CalArts, and it was – she was under – it was – it was a situation whereby she knew that she had a limited amount of time that she could remain there because it was going to be developed by the Newhall Land and Development Company into this huge housing development.

But instead of giving her notice that they were going to be needing this building, one day her daughter is driving down the freeway and she said, "Mom, I think" – she called her mom and she said, "I think you better get over here fast. They are destroying your building" – and with all of her art in it. And so she raced down there. And sure enough there were these bulldozers and they were in the process of knocking down her building with all of her art, and it was all lying all over the place and they were throwing things into dumpsters.

Well, the upshot of it was is a big lawsuit developed and she did finally get a settlement, but it was a very, very, very long, contentious thing that she had to go through. So that took her out of the studio for at least five years, this whole thing.

MS. AYRES: And who is the lawyer in her case?

MS. FELSEN: Michael Dan, who is a pit bull of a lawyer. And he and his then-wife were clients of mine, and I knew he was the perfect lawyer for her, and he was.

MS. AYRES: Are there lawyers in L.A. who are sympathetic, who would tend to take cases of artists because they are in some way connected to the art world, as he was?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, absolutely. Another one is –

MS. AYRES: Joe Austin? Did he –

MS. FELSEN: Joe Austin. But Joe is too nice, you know. For this situation –

MS. AYRES: Not a pit bull? [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: He – yeah, he's more of a – I mean, he can – well, one time we needed another lawyer. Jack Quinn –

MS. AYRES: Jack Quinn.

MS. FELSEN: – who's also helped us with contracts.

Did I talk about that with the Chris Burden? When we had – one of Chris Burden's installations was the *Flying Kayak*, and in order to experience this kayak there was a staircase that Chris had built that you would climb up to sit in this flying kayak that was suspended from the ceiling. This was back on La Cienega between the two skylights – which is a little scary – but anyway it worked. So – but he built it so that it would hold a person's weight, and then you could kind of fly it, and then there were fans blowing that blew it all over, and then there was this projection image of a helicopter flying around.

And so Chris said, well, you know, since people are going to flying here, suspended from the ceiling, maybe we should have some kind of a legal document, you know, having them sign a waiver or something. So that's when I went to Jack Quinn, and he said sure, I'll write it up for you, he said, but it won't do you any good – [laughs] – in case something happens. But fortunately nothing did. We even had Steve Martin flying in there one day and it was fun. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: I'm interested in this because the art world is so complex, and it just seems to me that there are areas of the art world that people don't think about and lawyers and contracts and especially when art is difficult or dangerous. Also real estate. Barry Sloane has been rather generous with his –

MS. FELSEN: You bet.

MS. AYRES: – time with people in the art world.

MS. FELSEN: Oh, he's helped so many people in the art world, sure, primarily artists, yeah.

MS. AYRES: Marnie Weber has always been an interesting artist. Is this – I remember when she was selling her collages and made collages of her performances. She's a performance artist, a video artist, and makes the most – wacky, I guess would be the best kind of word – [laughter] – of complex, funny installations. I can't begin to describe them.

MS. FELSEN: And you've left out another aspect of her activities, which is music performance.

MS. AYRES: Music performance as opposed to some other kind of performance, yes.

MS. FELSEN: Right, exactly. Exactly. But, oh, no, she is an absolute delight and they are wacky, and they're a little bit – it's – I don't know what they call it – "Fractured Fairy Tales," you remember that, on television? That's sort of what her work is like. And she started out doing these collages and cutting things out from magazines, but she became a little concerned about their archival quality. So she started working with a photographer, who would photograph her scenes that she would set up, using herself dressed up in costume and other people as actors, and always funny animal costumes. And they're absolutely – charming isn't the right word because that makes it sound a little too cute because there is this dark side to what she does, and that's really quite wonderful.

MS. AYRES: Marnie Weber is married to another one of your artists, Jim Shaw. I have a slight memory of you and me talking about Roy Dowell, and you had some reservation about taking on an artist who was a partner of another artist at your gallery, Lari Pittman. This seems to be a consideration that belongs to the old days – [laughs] – in some ways.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Is there any – are there any particular disadvantages, difficulty even –

MS. FELSEN: No, actually –

MS. AYRES: – in working with a married couple?

MS. FELSEN: With Jim and Marnie it didn't seem to be a problem at all. They were both very supportive of one another, which was quite nice. And when one was having a show, the other was there to help and so forth. So it was never a problem. Jim was another one of the artists who left, you know, when everybody else left. Not

everybody, but that group left.

MS. AYRES: And then when Marnie left briefly, she came back and it was a whole separate issue probably from – or did she leave when Jim –

MS. FELSEN: When she left the gallery, she said, you know, I am tired of spending all this energy and money on doing these shows in Los Angeles when I don't get the support from the collectors and the museums that I do in New York and in Europe. And I understand that completely, I've heard that before. I heard it from Richard Jackson years ago. And of course, you know, the king of this was Ed Kienholz when he was so angry at L.A. and he would only show in Germany.

And so I understood that, and she did it – she told me this in the best possible spirit. But then she came back just recently, so we scheduled her new show. So –

MS. AYRES: And Joan Jonas, is she your only artist who doesn't live in Los Angeles?

MS. FELSEN: No, Judith Barry.

MS. AYRES: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm. Judith Barry is a video –

MS. FELSEN: Right. Yeah, both video artists, as it happens. Yeah.

MS. AYRES: Does that make it easier, or it just an accident?

MS. FELSEN: No, it's – I had met Judith years ago when I was in Venice for a Biennale with Mike Kelley, and we were – Mike and I were installing his piece and Judith was installing her piece right across the way at the Arsenale. And I came to meet her at that time. And I guess she was out in L.A. doing some guest artist appearances at UCLA, I think, and she just came to me and she said she'd like to show in L.A. and was I interested? And I had great admiration for her work, so I said, sure.

MS. AYRES: Now that's about the third or fourth time you've said an artist just came to you.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. AYRES: Do you think you're perceived as being both an excellent place to show, but also someone who's very sympathetic and open to "difficult" art or – not – I mean, that's the wrong word; someone who's open to that kind of approach?

MS. FELSEN: Well, you have to remember that artists come to me all the time.

MS. AYRES: Yes, I know.

MS. FELSEN: And they come to every gallery all the time. But –

MS. AYRES: But not usually – these are usually artists who don't have galleries or don't have a career or they're trying to establish a career.

MS. FELSEN: Yes.

MS. AYRES: But you – most of the artists that wandered into your gallery, including the artist who's showing at Santa Monica Museum right now, are coming to you with a background, with a record of some kind.

MS. FELSEN: Well, they must see something there. I thought it was curious, actually. But – and back to Judith Barry, though. She knew me and she knew we had some – you know, not a very strong relationship – but we knew one another and I think she felt comfortable with me. She wanted to show in L.A. and she felt this was, you know, as good a place as any, maybe. [Laughs.] So that's why she came to me. So –

MS. AYRES: It would be wonderful to just go on and talk about each one of your artists this way, but I don't think we really should indulge ourselves. I wanted to just ask you a little bit about Laura Owens, who might be one of the most controversial artists working in L.A. today. How did you find her? Did you see that famous MFA show that – after her graduation from Art Center? Was it Art Center or CalArts? CalArts.

MS. FELSEN: I became familiar with Laura Owens because of a collector who was active at the time, Clyde Beswick. And he said, you know, I really think – here's this artist I really think you should see her. So he gave me her number – I guess – and so I called her and went over to see her. And ordinarily I don't pay too much attention to this. You know, if – just because a collector tells me this, I know that there's something – and I trusted him and his opinion – but I trusted his opinion about there must be a buzz about this artist's work, and

that's what I was hearing.

I went to the studio and I was not impressed by the work. But I thought, well, I'm going to try this because I thought I'm going to be able to sell this work. I knew that because of this buzz that I already perceived was happening. And so we had a show, sure enough, and we did very, very well and very large paintings, and it wasn't difficult to sell at all. And I thought, oh my God, you know? And then, you know, there was that article in *Artforum* that was read by everyone, I think. And I never got that kind of work, never ever, and she and I just didn't get on. We really didn't get on.

MS. AYRES: So she's no longer with you?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, no. We just had that one show and that was the end.

MS. AYRES: One show. Because there's also Michael Duncan's review of her show at MOCA in *Art in America* that completely trashed the show. I think it's amazing that this artist manages to provoke such polarized opinion. I don't know anyone who's indifferent. They either defend the art or dislike it intensely.

MS. FELSEN: Right, right.

MS. AYRES: What did you think of her retrospective, and – well, retrospective; she's too young. What did you think of her exhibition at the MOCA?

MS. FELSEN: I actually was happy to see the newer paintings because I thought she's getting better. I thought she's finally learning how to paint. [Laughs.]

But those paintings that I showed, I thought they were just awful.

MS. AYRES: I've always been a defender – [laughs] – of Laura Owens. I've always liked that work, work that I saw at ACME before she had a show with you. She was just something so –

MS. FELSEN: No, no, no – that was after.

MS. AYRES: That was after? Well, she was also showing in artist shows – artist-generated shows and things like that.

MS. FELSEN: She had already agreed to be in a small group show with Regen Projects, and – but anyway –

MS. AYRES: Well, let's talk a little bit about the general issues relating to the 1990s and beyond. There are the big, important exhibitions that get a lot of press attention and attract large audiences. For instance, Ann Goldstein's "A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation." That opened in 1989 and seemed a summing up of 1980s text- and photo-based art, much of it directed to identity issues. Paul Schimmel's "Helter Skelter" opened in 1992 and seemed a kind of personal intuitive leap into the 1990s. You had artists in both these shows. How would you contrast the curatorial styles of these two art exhibitions?

MS. FELSEN: Well, you know, with Paul's shows there's always this enormous amount of energy, and there certainly was an enormous amount of energy in "Helter Skelter." With Ann's shows, they're very thoughtful, they're well-conceived and well-worked-out, but they are – they're more of an intellectual exercise, I think. And so I think that's the difference between the two, primarily.

MS. AYRES: But one did seem a summing up, the sort of show that a museum does when it catches the end of a period.

MS. FELSEN: Except that I thought that "A Forest of Signs" had a narrower focus, for sure. So there was certainly a lot more going on in that period than that revealed.

MS. AYRES: And talking about "Helter Skelter," which became really a national – perhaps even international event –

MS. FELSEN: Oh, absolutely.

MS. AYRES: – this is a matter of taste on my part, but I thought that the women in the show, all of whom I admire, were not served as well by the curation and in the installation –

MS. FELSEN: Absolutely, no.

MS. AYRES: – possibly with the exception of Nancy Rubens, but –

MS. FELSEN: Nancy – but she was placed so badly, I thought.

MS. AYRES: Mm-hmm. Liz Larner's piece, Meg Cranston, Megan Williams. It just seems –

MS. FELSEN: They weren't strong. They weren't – maybe their placement was such because of the nature of the work, but it – those are curious choices. Megan Williams at that time was doing all these wonderful drawings, and that's what he had her do, but they couldn't hold up to all the other activities that were going on.

MS. AYRES: I also felt – not that I'm doing Paul's curating for him – [laughs] – but I also felt that Carol Caroompas, and especially Karen Carson, with her large constructive paintings with clocks from 1990 and 1991, really belonged in that show.

MS. FELSEN: Well, of course they did. Absolutely. And they would have been able to hold their own there much, much better; much, much stronger.

Meg's show – Meg's work for that show was – it was interesting work, but it didn't fit into the sensibility of the work by the guys. And where I think you're absolutely right, Karen and Carol, their work certainly would have fit right in.

MS. AYRES: I'm maybe wrong here, but – and I have the feeling that Paul settled on his men artists from the beginning. They were all artists that he had worked with closely or that he knew well, followed their careers.

MS. FELSEN: That's right. That's –

MS. AYRES: – and then he began to think about, oh dear, we don't have any women in this show. And although all the women were admirable, I don't think it had the same curatorial passion behind it and that it showed in the exhibition. And indeed, when a portion of the show went to Vienna –

MS. FELSEN: Yeah.

MS. AYRES: – I think Nancy perhaps was the only woman.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. AYRES: What did you think of the inclusion of Robert Williams?

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] Well, I'm not an admirer of that work, and I – it – I think maybe Paul was trying to become more populist or something, you know, and that's very nice.

MS. AYRES: But he also didn't go to Vienna. I mean, he also is one of the artists that didn't go to Vienna.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, it didn't – I thought that was extending things beyond the boundaries of where it should be.

MS. AYRES: It is an example of an artist – well, again, we were talking about looking at the collections when we look at shows. It seemed to me each one of those works were bought by somebody in the Valley that probably had it in their rec room or their bar.

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Is this too strong a guess? [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] No, very likely. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: In 1997, the Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen presented their exhibition, "Sunshine and Noir: Art in L.A. 1960 to 1997." What did you think of the exhibition? And do you think a first comprehensive look like this had to originate outside of Los Angeles?

MS. FELSEN: Well, I think it was ambitious for Lars Nittve, the curator, to do this, but he didn't listen to me – [laugh] – enough. You know, I would have liked to have had him be more influenced by what I was trying to tell him. But he had his own ideas, and maybe that's the way it should be. You know, here he is, a European, and it's his point of view and what – and the way he sees Los Angeles, and so that's only his point of view and that's what it should be, I suppose. But it was – it was okay, you know. It was all right. There were some really good things. Alexis Smith looked really good and –

MS. AYRES: Jason Rhoades.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, Jason, I wasn't crazy about that work of Jason's.

MS. AYRES: Even though he was one of your artists.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, he wasn't anymore, I think, at this time. Was he? No, I don't think he was anymore.

MS. AYRES: But one your artists in the sense that you –

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, well, he had been, and I wasn't too excited about that. And I think his choice – the works – the Mike Kelley works were not so great, but there could have been a better choice.

MS. AYRES: Are you thinking specifically that he should have made different choices or that he might have included different artists?

MS. FELSEN: Different artists, I think.

MS. AYRES: Of course, one of the constitutional hazards of the curator is that everyone, as I just did, re-curates your show for you –

MS. FELSEN: Sure, of course.

MS. AYRES: – because we all have a different take.

MS. FELSEN: Sure.

MS. AYRES: But when you say he didn't listen to you – and I know you're being a little bit facetious here and also serious – what do you mean specifically about artists, about a take on L.A., about a way of arranging it? He went through these decades.

MS. FELSEN: It's interesting – and Karen and I have talked about that – Karen Carson and I have talked about this a great deal, that she has never really gotten the support of museums anywhere, and it's hard to understand because this is such a strong artist. And I think she's always not in tune with what is going on at the moment. She's always either a step ahead or a step to one side – never a step behind. But somewhere off somewhere else. And people aren't ready to look at what it is that she's doing.

I mean, like this last show that she had was a magnificent show, paintings on silk of forest fires. Now who in the world would think of this? It was magnificent, absolutely magnificent. And we sold a few drawings and that was it. We didn't sell any of the works on silk, just paper works and light boxes of forest fires, we sold some of those. And it was just wonderful. But the museums have never really supported her until Lynn Zelevansky bought this piece that we talked about yesterday, and that was a 30-year-old piece.

MS. AYRES: Yes, and bought for historical reasons to –

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: – sort of illustrate a point in the history of L.A. art.

MS. FELSEN: – to go back, you know, and catch up, you know. And does that mean that Karen is going to have to wait another 30 years until, you know, they buy something that she's making today?

MS. AYRES: How would you compare "Sunshine and Noir" to the big "Made in California: Art, Image and Identity, 1900-2000" exhibition at LACMA in 2000 and 2001, and specifically the contemporary section, which was the last one to open?

MS. FELSEN: Well, I think there's no comparison. Well, first of all, "Sunshine and Noir" was – well, I guess it was post-World War II, "Sunshine and Noir," wasn't it?

MS. AYRES: 1960, I think.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, mm-hmm.

MS. AYRES: Well, they probably had works from the late 1950s.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. AYRES: Berman and –

MS. FELSEN: So – and it was interesting in "Sunshine and Noir" that room where they had that early – those early abstract paintings. They were wonderful paintings, but they were so badly installed and the light was terrible. But I mean, how can you expect light in Denmark to compare to light in Los Angeles? But there should

have been some kind of sensitivity to that. And they had good examples, but they were just – it was – oh, that room was dreary!

The L.A. County show, "Made in California," it was too – I think they were trying too hard to be political or to bring out aspects of our social community rather than the art community. I think that seemed to be a priority for them. And then when they got into the contemporary stuff and the – I'm sorry, but that Judy Chicago car getting a prominent position when there are so many other artists that were stuck in a corner that were much more significant of that time. And I think there were some lopsided emphases that –

MS. AYRES: Did you think it was peculiar that this last section was the section when they actually drew back from presenting videos and films of the contemporary goings-on? I mean, they had, for instance – they – well, all sorts of photographs of riots and parts of the history of L.A., including the famous – [laughs] – I'm blanking on it, isn't it awful?

MS. FELSEN: What do you mean?

MS. AYRES: When the riots started because –

MS. FELSEN: Oh, Rodney – you mean the –

MS. AYRES: The Rodney King video that they showed – that they showed at the Whitney.

MS. FELSEN: Right, yeah.

MS. AYRES: They had all sorts of opportunities to relate contemporary art to film if that's what they were interested in doing.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, it was more political. It was more about a history of – more to do with current events of the day, I think.

MS. AYRES: Except for the contemporary section, when they didn't take the opportunity to do that at all.

MS. FELSEN: Right, right.

MS. AYRES: Do you have any comments on the title "Sunshine and Noir?" Two earlier exhibitions in the 1980s were called "Sunshine and Shadow," and another "L.A. Hot and Cool." In 1974 Peter Plagens' groundbreaking narrative of West Coast art was called "Sunshine Muse." [Laughter.] By 1992, Schimmel's "Helter Skelter" was emphasizing the noir aspect of L.A.

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Do you think this urge to a polar swing is – catches a reality or might be a sign of old provincial thinking?

MS. FELSEN: Well, we are – this is the film capital of the world, and I think that's what has influence.

MS. AYRES: The noir.

MS. FELSEN: Yes. That's what influenced everything, and I think all of these titles – the sunshine thing and the tourist thing and the history of the development of California and sunshine and all of that. So I think it's really natural.

And I remember when Paul Schimmel was working on "Helter Skelter" and he was trying to think of a title, and I knew that he had some title in his mind. And finally he called me up one day and he said, "Well, I think I've decided on the title, and this is what it's going to be." And he told me "Helter Skelter" and I said, "Paul" – of course, everybody told him this. No one approved of this title, "Helter Skelter," because of the connection with the Manson deal – so – but I think he liked that, that sort of aspect, I think that was interesting, too, the bad boy thing.

MS. AYRES: So you're forgiving of these titles? You have – titles are hell, anyway.

MS. FELSEN: I'm sure.

MS. AYRES: But I certainly can't imagine a New York exhibition with that kind of a title.

MS. FELSEN: Right, exactly.

MS. AYRES: "Sunshine and Noir" was seen in a reduced and crowded form in Los Angeles at the Armand

Hammer Museum when it was under the directorship of Henry Hopkins. When Henry retired, Annie Philbin came from New York to be director. What is your take on the importance of the Armand Hammer Museum to Los Angeles in the past and in the present?

MS. FELSEN: Well, in the past – what do you mean by in the past?

MS. AYRES: Well, initially UCLA?

MS. FELSEN: Okay. Well, you know, there's another title that you forgot about. What about – or did you mention "Pacific Dreams?"

MS. AYRES: "Pacific Dreams?" No, I didn't.

MS. FELSEN: That's another one. So that had to do with the surrealist stuff that was going on here in the '30s –

MS. AYRES: And that was Susan Ehrlich and –

MS. FELSEN: – '30s and '40s, and that was a wonderful show. That was – I guess that was during Henry's time, wasn't it?

MS. AYRES: Yes, it was.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. And so that was a standout exhibition for me during that period. And then when Annie Philbin came, I guess there were already things on the books, so it took a while for her to get her stride. But I think she's definitely gotten it now. And –

I'm not sure about her curatorial staff, though. I'm not sure that it's real strong.

MS. AYRES: You said earlier that when people come from the East Coast to Los Angeles, it takes them a while to get their sea legs or their stride. Would this be true of both Elsa Longhauser and Annie Philbin? Did it take a while for them to get a hold of what? What about Los Angeles took them so long to catch or –

MS. FELSEN: Well, I think Annie is probably a quicker learner than most. And she has a very strong outgoing personality, so I think it's probably not been as difficult for her. I think her biggest problem right now is raising enough money, which is no different than any other museum.

And Elsa, Elsa's a little softer and she has a really terrific associate director, Lisa Melandri, who's really, really quite good. And – but they have a smaller budget, of course, and a smaller space and it's scaled down somewhat. But I think their programming is picking up, too, for sure.

MS. AYRES: Do you – you can't answer for the entire L.A. art community – but Santa Monica Museum had a very consistent – provide very consistent support to Los Angeles artists? Do you think Elsa is interested in expanding that to being a more national and international –

MS. FELSEN: Well, she seems to be doing that, yes. And I don't know how much Elsa gets around to see what's going on in terms of art production in L.A. I don't know that she has the time to do that.

MS. AYRES: And lest I sound too critical of moving from support for showing L.A. artists, there's certainly a value for L.A. artists for their work to be seen in a larger context.

MS. FELSEN: Well, the fact that she took on the Michael Duncan show – no, she didn't, that's right; she's going to. I was thinking of the Kim McConnell show, and – which is not exactly L.A., but it's close to L.A. And then this Pat O'Neill show, of course, which is terrific, that she's taking a Julie Lazar-curated exhibition.

MS. AYRES: And she was rather adventurous with that interesting show that Laura Owens did with Chris –

MS. FELSEN: Ofili.

MS. AYRES: – Ofili and –

MS. FELSEN: And Peter Doig.

MS. AYRES: – and Peter Doig.

MS. FELSEN: That was a wonderful show. I really liked that show a lot, yeah.

MS. AYRES: That seemed to me an original idea and it was artist-generated, but she was willing to go with it.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. Right, right.

MS. AYRES: Speaking of provincialism – and I'm not sure we were, but maybe we were – do you draw a distinction between provincial and regional?

MS. FELSEN: You know, I've wondered about that. Let me think about that. Yes, I guess there is a distinction. Regional just means something geographic. Provincial is a state of mind, I guess, a very narrow state of mind.

MS. AYRES: I mean, people often say New York is provincial, but that they're being either jealous or telling the truth. Which one? Which do you think? Is there a provincial aspect to New York?

MS. FELSEN: Of course. There's provincial attitudes about everything, about parrots. [Laughs.] So you know, it's people who don't get beyond their borders.

MS. AYRES: What do you think of the fairly recent curatorial penchant for mixing up fine art, design, fashion design and social criticism, as "Made in California" did?

MS. FELSEN: I'm not interested in that. [Sighs.]

MS. AYRES: [Imitates Ms. Felson's sigh.]

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] It's, again, trying to – this whole thing about art and entertainment that bothers me a lot.

MS. AYRES: Do you think such shows blur distinctions between fine art and design art? And I gather you wouldn't hold to blurring those distinctions.

MS. FELSEN: Well, I think they wanted to do that. I think that's their goal, to do that, and I think they're trying to attract a larger audience. And you know, it's a less elitist point of view.

MS. AYRES: Sometimes I think it actually debases the fine art when juxtapositions are made that seem to trivialize something. I felt a little bit of that in "Made in America," where fashion mannequins were –

MS. FELSEN: "Made in California?"

MS. AYRES: "Made in California," where paintings seemed to be decoration within fashion tableau or architectural tableau. I think there's a fascination for showing paintings the way they might have been shown in homes or in earlier installations, but at some point we are in a museum.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I think it's about popularizing art and putting art in a more familiar context for the less familiar viewer.

MS. AYRES: Well, there have been fashion and exhibition design all along, and I suppose this too will come to an end and something new will come along.

MS. FELSEN: Well, that's fine. I mean you can have – actually, isn't there a movement afoot to start a museum of design in Southern California? So that's the place for it.

MS. AYRES: What is the role of the Eli Broad collection in the L.A. art world? Not too long ago LACMA showed selections from his collection in a fairly large exhibition. Was that exhibition a bid for an eventual donation of works as much as it was a service to the L.A. art community?

MS. FELSEN: Well, I have no idea about the inner workings of the museum. However, of course! You know, to see – Eli collects very important works of art, and it's quite wonderful to make them available to the community. And of course! I think it's an important thing to do.

What's going to happen with the future with this new building and the whole collection being there, or a good portion of it being there, and I think the fact that Stephanie Barron is going to be the curator of this whole shebang is, I think, a positive thing. I mean, I think she'll do a good job.

MS. AYRES: We have in L.A. institutions devoted to the collections of particular individuals, such as the Armand Hammer's permanent collection, which is, I think, not so often visited as the larger and perhaps finer Norton Simon Museum. Do you think that the Hammer collection might better have gone to LACMA to fill in some of the gaps?

MS. FELSEN: I think it might have been better to go out of state somewhere. [Laughs.] It's just – it's – I go in there occasionally and it's so dreary that –

MS. AYRES: Well, there are a few – there are some fine works in that collection that might have filled in gaps in a major museum. I guess I'm talking about a larger issue of how a collector chooses to preserve a particular vision in history as opposed to thinking about maybe the best place for it to be seen.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, unfortunately they very often decide by virtue of how large their name is going to appear on the top of the building. So –

MS. AYRES: Have you been to the Pasadena Museum of California Art, which is dedicated to the exhibition of California art, architecture and design from 1850 to the present?

MS. FELSEN: I have.

MS. AYRES: Can there be too many art institutions? [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: No. I don't think there can be too many. I wish that they had a more interesting program, though. When – their opening show, they had invited three curators. I thought that was a good start.

MS. AYRES: That was Peter Frank and Michael Duncan and –

MS. FELSEN: And another woman who did the California impressionists whose name I don't recall.

MS. AYRES: And I don't, either.

MS. FELSEN: And Tom Solomon.

MS. AYRES: Tom Solomon.

MS. FELSEN: So Tom Solomon did art of the '70s and it was of the Bay Area, as I recall.

MS. AYRES: Yes. That was a Paul Kos –

MS. FELSEN: Yes, and Tom Marioni and those people. It was – Tom's – I thought Tom's show was really interesting. Michael Duncan's was really interesting. Peter Frank's was just so-so. And I can't really comment on the impressionist work because I didn't pay too much attention to it.

MS. AYRES: Do you think there's a place for a museum dedicated to California art, architecture and design from 1850 to the present?

MS. FELSEN: I do, but I think they'd better get some curators to curate exhibitions there that have some substance to them, as, for example, this show – that opening show. But since then it's been very lame.

MS. AYRES: An interesting 1990s phenomena is the reconsideration of local early modernism in exhibitions such as Susan Ehrlich's, "Turning the Tide" and "Pacific Dreams," which you've already commented upon. Bonnie Clearwater's book, *West Coast Duchamp*, published in 1991, was also a revelation. Interestingly enough, the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum in Logan, Utah has a superb West Coast modernism collection and a growing contemporary collection, primarily because of the collector George Wanlass.

Could you talk about the importance of George Wanlass as a collector specializing not only in California contemporary art, but also in the area of Western or West Coast early modernism?

MS. FELSEN: Well, as I understand this – and you may know more about this than I – but as I understand it, his interest had been in the collection of art of the Western states, and – which was fine – and more of the modernist period. But he had a son who was an art student and an artist, and the son, whose name was Ralph, was trying very hard to get his father more interested in more contemporary work. And I met him when Ralph brought his father in – and he had been coming to the gallery and he brought his father and he introduced me – and this is the very early stages of when he was starting to look at contemporary art, and he responded fairly quickly. And he has a very scholarly way of looking at art. He wants to know everything about a particular artist. He does a lot of research on his own. A very, very unusual, thoughtful collector.

MS. AYRES: And in fact it was Ralph that introduced him to Karen Carson.

MS. FELSEN: No, it was me! This is what happened. The day that Ralph brought his father in, Ralph was thinking that his father might be interested in Karen's work. So at the time I only had two examples of her work at the gallery, and I said, however, Karen would be more than happy to have us come for a studio visit. Are you interested? And he said sure. So – [claps her hands once] – that's how we did it. We walked in the studio and Karen – [laughs] – there something happened. I could see the electricity immediately, and it was great. And the upshot of it was is that first day he bought not one, but two paintings. [Laughs.] And then the rest is history

because they ended up getting married.

MS. AYRES: Rosamund, what does it mean when we say the “art world?” What are the interlocking components of the art world? You know, just start with the artists and the critics and –

MS. FELSEN: Well, the artists and the critics and writers, the museum, the dealers and the collectors.

MS. AYRES: And the curators and the art schools. But I want to talk a little bit about collectors, again, because it’s an important component of what you do, obviously. A selected list of collectors who might have been important – who have been important to Los Angeles either in the past or present would include Robert Rowan, Betty and Monte Factor, Stanley and Elyse Grinstein, Michael Blankfort, Sterling Holloway, Fred Weisman, Marcia Weisman, Bill and Merry Norris, Melinda and Ed Wortz, as well as Joel Wachs, Peter and Eileen Norton, Clyde Beswick, Dean Valentine, Lorrin and Deane Wong, Barry Sloane, Gary and Tracey Mezzatesta, George Wanlass. How many of these collectors – and you could certainly add more, I’m sure – were or are regulars at your gallery, and how often, and whom do they buy, because we often hear that L.A. doesn’t have a big collecting base, and it seems to me that –

MS. FELSEN: Well, if that’s all there is for a city this size, it’s not very many.

MS. AYRES: No, it isn’t all there is, though.

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: I mean, I’m sure you could add more. And also it goes over a period of three or four decades.

MS. FELSEN: Sure, of course.

MS. AYRES: How many of these people were regulars in the gallery?

MS. FELSEN: All of them except for the Factors, I think. Every one of those. Unfortunately, Bob Rowan is no longer with us, Clyde Beswick is no longer collecting. But the rest of them, I see them all.

MS. AYRES: What is the role of those who collect art on a much smaller scale, who follow, perhaps, one or two artists or who buy only occasionally a particular work that strikes them? I’m thinking of an artist like Tom Knechtel, for instance, who is in important collections, but is also in collections of people who tend to collect modestly or sometimes not at all. And I think I touched on especially tastes like that when we were talking about Robert Williams. It seems to me that these could be – these are an important collecting base for you, but they also could be a very difficult –

MS. FELSEN: It’s not difficult, no. It’s our bread and butter, actually. And these are people usually, they are buying modestly because they have modest means with which to buy art. So – but we have to rely on these kind of people.

And then sometimes, you know, somebody will come in and will say, you know, I’m just starting to get interested in collecting art, and can you guide me a little bit? And that doesn’t happen very often, but it does occasionally. And this comes to my mind because this is someone who was in just the other day, who I had helped. He bought Grant Mudford. He bought Mitch Syrop. How’s that for a stretch? And now he’s thinking about Kim MacConnel.

But he needs to think about these things, and these people just beginning to collect have concerns like, well, I’m running out of wall space. Well, a real collector, that’s the last thing they think of, you know? Either they put things in storage or they put things in a closet or they rotate things or something like that. That is never an issue. The issue is, is they want to acquire a work of art because it has special meaning for them, the excitement of being a participant in the development of an artist’s maturity, and they want to participate in this. And so it’s all of these things that inspire people to collect. But the modest collector, those – they’re important. And you know, they could win the lottery, too, you know? [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Do you ever get a sense of a potential collector’s taste and direct them to another gallery, or do you assume that they’re just doing their homework and they’ve gone to other people, too, if they’ve come to you to be educated?

MS. FELSEN: You know, they don’t usually talk to me about, you know, other artists. Occasionally they will or maybe we will discuss a museum exhibition and they liked a particular work and, what did I think of that particular work.

MS. AYRES: So when they come to you and say, guide me, they mean guide me around your gallery, what you have to offer?

MS. FELSEN: Yes. Yes, well, this one collector that I was telling you about was wanting help with getting an Ellsworth Kelly print from Gemini. So I helped him. He knew he wanted an Ellsworth Kelly and I helped him decide which one, I think.

MS. AYRES: I see, I see. What is the role of museum support groups and their gallery visits with the assigned curators? Do these visits help you develop a client base, and do you ever ask a collector to buy a work for a museum?

MS. FELSEN: Well, yes, I have done that. In terms of the groups coming, I think probably the support group from LACMA I've had greater contact with than the support groups from MOCA, for whatever reasons. Maybe it's because the LACMA curators like to come to my gallery, and so they bring their groups. I have a feeling that that's probably what it is.

Yes, I have talked to collectors about – not often – but only if I feel that this collector is extremely supportive of a particular artist's work. Then maybe it's a work that – I think there was a Jason Rhoades that MOCA wanted to have and I knew this collector would never want to have this in his house because it was too outrageous, you know, in terms of materials. But I said, well, buy it for MOCA. No, it was LACMA, that's what it was, because Stephanie Barron had come in and said she really liked that piece a lot. And so I talked to this collector and he bought it for the museum, that's right.

MS. AYRES: But again, do the members of these support groups ever become part of your collecting base?

MS. FELSEN: Yes, they do. Sure, absolutely, and some of them have become quite regulars. Yeah.

MS. AYRES: So it's valuable for the curators, it's valuable for the support group in terms of education, and it's valuable for the artist and it's valuable for the city.

MS. FELSEN: Yes, it is.

MS. AYRES: Well, would you speak about the role of groups that help fund exhibitions, such as the Fellows of Contemporary Art and the Pasadena Art Alliance.

MS. FELSEN: Well, I've already spoken a little bit about the Pasadena Art Alliance. They're such a wonderful group of women, and they have just done just great work over the years in being willing to support things that might be a little risky, you know, in some people's minds. But they trust the curators, or whoever approached them, and they go ahead and do it.

The Fellows I think have done also a remarkable job, and they're more of a – well, I shouldn't say more – but they are a real social group, too, and they like to go on trips where they visit museums and collections in other cities and countries. But what they really do that's quite wonderful is do exhibitions with wonderful catalogs and supporting California art and – at various museums. So that's a really good service that they do.

MS. AYRES: I believe they've set themselves up as a nonprofit and they apply for grants, for instance, from the NEA.

MS. FELSEN: I believe so.

MS. AYRES: Do you feel that's a reasonable thing for a group that exists to fund shows to do?

MS. FELSEN: Well, however you're able to raise money, I think it's fine as long as it's legal. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: All right. Would you talk a little bit about Vivian Rowan and her position in the art world and the importance or consequences of art world socializing? There seems to be an interesting intersection between the social and cultural world.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, this is true. So Vivian Rowan, the widow of Bob Rowan, I think remarkably does not drive. And I think this – since she was on her own, this – she began to miss being part of the social thing when Bob was around, and she had this idea of putting together these dinners. Actually, she was doing these dinners even when Bob was alive, but then decided it was even more important to continue these with, you know, some of those of us who have been around for, you know, 20, 30, 40 years and getting us together, and then gradually including newer people, younger artists, younger people, and to – oh, I think 50, 60 people.

And this happens twice a year and she organizes the whole thing and it costs $25 for everybody to go and anybody can go. It's not an exclusive thing. Anybody who is, you know – I mean, she tells me if there's anyone that I think would be interesting to come, you know, please invite them and have them come and send in their $25 check.

MS. AYRES: How important is the socializing in terms of forwarding an artist or a curator's career, specifically her parties? I mean, I know artists or people who think it may be important, but I myself would answer not very –

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: – that all of these connections have been made already.

MS. FELSEN: Well –

MS. AYRES: But people are always somewhat suspicious about in-group socializing, but it's a natural part of living.

MS. FELSEN: They are part – some of these people who go regularly to these dinners are people who are in a position to be able to fund certain things. So there are patrons, and I think if they get to know other certain people – you know, curators or artists – and feel comfortable with them, feel that they're doing something worthwhile, then they would be happy to contribute in any way that they can. So there is that.

So rather than just having a businesslike relationship with everyone, it's much more comfortable if you have a social relationship because the art world – I mean, it took me a while to understand this, but in a gallery situation you never know who's going to come walking through your door. And I have learned that it is essential to have a social relationship with the people who come in. It's not like we're working in a department store.

You must have – because art is a very personal thing and it affects one emotionally as well as intellectually, and they're expensive. You know, it's not like buying a pair of shoes or not even like buying a car, although people talk to me about buying cars all the time because they know I'm such a car person. [Laughs.] It's amazing that people – I learn all about people's private lives and everything because of this kind of relationship that seems to be essential as part of the art world.

MS. AYRES: Yes, it's one of the more interesting and amazing kind of relationships, where you have been close to somebody perhaps for years. You're more than colleagues, but you're not quite intimates, and I think that characterizes a lot of art world socializing.

MS. FELSEN: This is true. This is true.

MS. AYRES: And people become very dear to you. Although you know a great deal about people that you don't know at all or very little of a lot of people who have become very dear to you. [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: What, after all, is the purpose of an opening? Is wine and cheese a ritual of the past?

MS. FELSEN: Well, the cheese is definitely a thing of the past. [Laughs.] But it's really for the artist. The opportunity for the artist to stand there and be there when his friends come, the other artists come, his family if he's still on those kind of terms with his family. It's really for the artist. It's very difficult to really concentrate on the art at an opening because there are so many people there that you know, that you're talking with. And if a serious collector really wants to have a good look at the show, they'll call beforehand and ask if they can come and have a preview so that they can look uninterrupted.

MS. AYRES: Oh, yes. I've been to openings where, fortunately for the artist and the dealer, practically everything was sold before the doors opened to the opening.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly right. So that's really – so that's what the opening's for. It's really a celebration for the artist.

MS. AYRES: And it's the social glue that holds the art world together, too, I would think.

MS. FELSEN: Sure, sure.

MS. AYRES: Let's put collecting aside for a moment. You spoke once about being a spectator; that is, if I can paraphrase for you – [laughs] – a viewer of art, a one-person audience for an artist's work. In fact, I think you said you were not creative, more of a spectator, and of course we earlier talked about the creative aspects of installing a show. But could you even begin to describe what goes on in your mind and when, as a receptive viewer, you encounter an unfamiliar work of art, and would you try?

MS. FELSEN: Of course, it depends on the work of art how I would respond, but – mostly it's if I don't understand it and I want to know – there's something there that I want to know more about it. What is this about? And I will – this is so much fun – [laughs] – just to have a dialogue with the artist about the work.

And it's really – having a dialogue about the work is different than the artist standing there and saying this is about this and this is about that.

That's not what the process is. In the course of this dialogue, you are learning about the artist and how the artist feels about everything and the priorities in the artist's mind, what the artist's goals are in terms of what the artist wants to express, all of these things that might not initially be readily accessible. But upon spending time with the work and the artist, I get to a point where I'm beginning to see.

And then the other thing is that once I'm working with the artist and we have an exhibition of the art, I'm very fortunate in that this art is up for a month and I have a month to spend with this. And it's particularly rewarding when I continue to get information and "stuff" from the art.

[END TAPE 2, SIDE B]

MS. AYRES: And in this case, the information comes, not from the artist, but from living with the art.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: Duchamp once described this encounter with a work of art as a, quote, "spark," unquote, that gives birth to something, like electricity. He spoke of an "aesthetic echo," and he contrasted that echo with taste. Does this distinction mean anything to you?

He also felt that most viewers were metaphorically colorblind to this echo. Would you agree?

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, absolutely I would agree, which is where Laura Owens comes in, I think. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: The – I think he defined taste as sort of what's going on conventionally at the time, what you inherit. And of course there are many, many different areas of taste and levels of taste. There's something a little problematic about the aesthetic echo. It's almost mystical.

But you feel that when you look at work?

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I do. And I feel very confident about that, too. I feel confident that this is something important that I'm looking at. I know that. I absolutely know that. I don't always know why.

MS. AYRES: And that's when you begin to go to the artist or look at it again and again –

MS. FELSEN: That's right.

MS. AYRES: – because after all, most people don't have the advantage of people in the art world, of going directly to the artist. I mean, that's the purpose of some of these specialized, privileged museum visits.

MS. FELSEN: Sure. But at the same time, that's our role as the dealer, because we are representing the artist. And when people want to know more about the art, I have the dialogue with the person about the art. And I'm not the same thing – I'm not the same thing as having a conversation with the artist. It's me that's talking.

MS. AYRES: You agree with Duchamp that most viewers are metaphorically colorblind to the echo and saying that after they begin to show interest, there's some way of giving access to this echo?

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. Sure.

MS. AYRES: You would take that position?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. But this takes time, and that's what a lot of people who are beginning – just beginning to look at art don't know. It's not like reading instructions or something. It's our manual. It's – it takes that time, and you have to be willing – [laughs] – you have to be willing to understand that. Yeah.

MS. AYRES: I don't know whether it's even worth talking about the criticism that contemporary art is elitist, because it's obviously clear that it takes a lot of work, a lot of looking, a lot of reading, a lot of talking.

MS. FELSEN: But you know, it isn't clear at the beginning. You know, I think a lot of people do not understand that. So –

MS. AYRES: That they want a quick take?

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. AYRES: We live in a culture of quick takes and sound bites right now.

MS. FELSEN: That's right.

MS. AYRES: Art seems to me, to some degree – some art plays into that, some art critiques that, and some art completely ignores it and provides another kind of slow experience.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. AYRES: What you were talking about earlier was the slow unfolding of a painting or a work of art over time –

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: – which only someone who lives with art or goes to art – to museums a great deal can experience.

Speaking of which, Christopher Knight once drew a distinction between a museum's public and its audience. I believe his point was that effective museum education is in the service of turning an amorphous public – known as public outreach – into a dedicated audience. Do you think this is a useful distinction?

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. [Pause.] Useful for whom?

MS. AYRES: Useful for museums to think about who might be concentrating too much on the public in terms of clicking in everybody that comes into an exhibition and counting up the numbers.

MS. FELSEN: Well, I mean, I understand that they have to do that. They have to do that, probably for grants and things like this and all of that. So they're really – it's essential that they have to.

But on the other hand, gosh, in the paper today, you know, the Museum of Modern Art now charging $20 admission – this is very unfortunate that this is happening. But museums have to try to so hard to raise money and to get attendance up and – [audio break] –

MS. AYRES: We were talking about the necessity of a museum to count up its people and suchlike, were we not?

MS. FELSEN: Yes.

MS. AYRES: And you were saying –

MS. FELSEN: That museums always have to be concerned about raising money, but I don't like the fact that they have been having to resort to what I call "entertainment art." And I think it – these are difficult times that we're living in. And I know that people don't want to face serious issues, and they want to know that everything is hunky-dory. And maybe that's why Thomas Kinkade has become so popular.

MS. AYRES: Oh, two questions there, though. But I remember now. You were talking about the Museum of Modern Art and its $20 –

MS. FELSEN: Twenty-dollar admission now that they're going to be charging.

MS. AYRES: And I suppose they will argue that they have a free day or a free evening. This would –

MS. FELSEN: Well, I'm glad that they're doing that.

MS. AYRES: But do they? I mean, I don't know.

MS. FELSEN: I don't know if they do or not.

MS. AYRES: I mean, that's – in terms of getting grants, they certainly have to pay attention to that.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. Yeah. No, I think this is – it's expensive enough living in New York as it is. So I feel bad for – I mean, even probably with the – the student rate is probably astronomical. So I don't know. I don't know.

MS. AYRES: The Kinkade show that was in Orange County somewhere was an odd show, because it wasn't a straightforward Kinkade show, and yet it was. Jeffrey Vallance has been involved in that show and also in the "God" show. How much of that Kinkade show was a Jeffrey Vallance installation and how much was it a matter-of-fact celebration of Kinkade?

MS. FELSEN: No, I think it was all Jeffrey Vallance. And Jeffrey being this incorrigible artist, he loves this idea. You know, this thing that we all have so much difficulty with in the art world. But he just – he think it's great. And he wanted –

MS. AYRES: Maybe we should stop and have you describe Kinkade's work. Even though he's so popular, maybe

not everyone knows this work – light. [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: Let's see. Paintings of English cottages and idyllic scenes that never existed in any place anywhere in the whole world except in people's imagination, and homey. It's sort of like a modern-day Norman Rockwell, only not nearly as interesting. And – but those kinds of subject, although there are no people in these scenes, now that I think about it.

MS. AYRES: Well, this comes awfully close to the traditional definition of kitsch, which is why it connects to Jeffrey's interest.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. But Jeffrey also is interested in the phenomenal popularity and financial success that this artist has made. And I think his idea was to explore, you know, what makes this particular artist such a financial success, where in the fine art world, you know, artists are really struggling to get an audience.

So this is, I think, what this was all about – nothing more than that.

MS. AYRES: Do you have an opinion on the didactic labeling that goes up in museums? Of course, it's never really done in commercial galleries. You might occasionally have a brochure or a handout or an artist's statement, but certainly not a description next to every work on the wall. There are different assumptions about the audience.

MS. FELSEN: True. There's a more general audience in a museum than in a gallery. And number two, in a gallery, there's always someone you can talk to about the art –

MS. AYRES: Whereas in a museum, you depend upon the guard.

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: You don't want to –

MS. FELSEN: And you don't always get straight information from the guard. But – so that's what it is, I think, to make people feel – at least – in museums they probably spend more time reading these didactic labels than they do looking at the art. But –

MS. AYRES: Some of these labels seem to assume that the painting or the work of art is there, in a way, to illustrate a narrative or a story line, and often seem to subvert just looking at the work. Is that too much to expect?

MS. FELSEN: No, I –

MS. AYRES: Is there – I often see people kind of nervous about just approaching a work of art without getting a little help from something.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah.

MS. AYRES: And that should be understood, and that –

MS. FELSEN: Right. Right. No, I think that that's – I'm sure that that's the logic behind this, in trying to make people feel more comfortable, so they don't just kind of stand there wondering what's going on here.

So it's okay. I think to describe it in great detail, I don't – I think that's going a little too far, because there are some assumptions that I think that are made that art – have nothing to do with the artists' intentions.

MS. AYRES: And get in the way of the – in – of the – what we would call – what we were calling, along with Duchamp, the aesthetic echo.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Speaking of critics – I know we were talking about Christopher Knight – what is the role of the art critic? Is it to critique the artist's work or help viewers get access to the art?

MS. FELSEN: Well, I think it's all of these things. And it's also – well, Christopher Knight is a good example. He is such a wonderful writer. And even though I don't always agree with him, I mean, so what? That's okay. He gets to the heart of things. He makes relationships with other things that a lot of people might not think about, both from an art historical or a contemporary, current event or some kinds of things, that he brings into it to help people put it into some kind of context.

So I think there is some art criticism that goes on that ends up being promotional. And I certainly object to that. Some art writers have a particular agenda, and there are certain kinds of art that they like to promote. Other writers are more neutral. And I think it's like any other kind of writing or criticism. So –

MS. AYRES: What do you think of Peter Clothier's so-called "phenomenological" approach to looking at art? He asks people to look long and hard at a particular work of art without preconceptions, in the front of the work of art, of the art, for at least an hour. He provides a kind of guided meditation in front of the work of art. Do you think this is a valuable experience in looking?

MS. FELSEN: Well, I've never done it with him, but I think – why not? I think that's a fine thing to do. And then people can go out and do things on their own, and maybe they won't on their own spend an hour looking at a particular work of art. But I mean, if you can in any way get people to spend more time looking at a work of art, that's a value.

MS. AYRES: So you would think it's just a different way of approaching art because it's a way that completely brackets out historical understanding of the history of the artist, the issues of the time.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. AYRES: And that certainly wouldn't be the only way to look at art, but you think it might be a useful experience.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. It's a point of entry, and to get people to spend more time looking at it.

MS. AYRES: I experienced an hour of that in front of a large wall painting by Keith Sklar. And maybe it might be a good time to talk about Keith, who was not with your gallery very long, but I think you were tremendously happy with his art or –

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I can imagine spending an hour looking at one of his paintings, because there's so much to look at. You certainly would have – and rather than looking at Robert Ryman for an hour, which would be a different experience.

Yeah, Keith came to me – [laughs] – I think it was Bennett Roberts – this was before he had the gallery – he came to me, and he said, "There's this artist who I think you might be interested in seeing, and I suggested that he call you." And he did.

So Keith came in – [laughs] – he must have brought in about 40 paintings. They were all like 12 by 14 or something like that. He was carrying them under his arm, and he brought them in and lined them up against the wall. And I thought, "Oh, my God."

Now it was very different from the kind of art that I usually show. But there was something that he was doing there that I thought was kind of interesting and kind of – very difficult, I would think, for him to do, actually. But – so we had a few shows. We had what, two or three shows, I think, together.

MS. AYRES: You said earlier you responded to Chris Burden as a person, as well as to the art. Did you feel that way with Keith, too?

MS. FELSEN: No, I didn't.

MS. AYRES: You were looking only at his art –

MS. FELSEN: No, he was too pushy. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: Has art criticism in L.A. improved since you opened your gallery? What is the state of art criticism in L.A. and its importance to an artist's career? People are always complaining there are not enough critics, there are not enough outlets.

MS. FELSEN: Yes – well, it's certainly true. I mean, to depend upon the *LA Times* and the *LA Weekly*, it's kind of tragic. Well, there's things like *X-tra* and some of these, you know, the magazines, but the periodicals are ones that really have the most momentary impact.

MS. AYRES: Well, how often are L.A. exhibitions covered by the national press? We have Michael Duncan at *Art in America*, and Benjamin Weissman and Bruce Hainley, too.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. And Chris Miles and various others.

MS. AYRES: Mm-hmm. It's usually something of an event when – museum shows are of course often –

MS. FELSEN: Sure.

MS. AYRES: – but for either a commercial gallery or a small university or college gallery to get national press is still an event.

MS. FELSEN: It is an event. It is indeed.

And then we're stuck way in the back of the magazine. But that's okay. It means a great deal to the artist and to the gallery, and certainly to the collector who's bought work by this particular artist.

I think people from elsewhere, other museums, will remember that they saw a review of a particular artist's work. And so this – it does have some value, definitely.

MS. AYRES: Do you call yourself a "gallerist," or do you like the old-fashioned, nuts-and-bolts term "dealer"?

MS. FELSEN: I'm a dealer.

MS. AYRES: [Laughs.]

MS. FELSEN: "Gallerist" seems a little pretentious. And I think it's because people wanted to get away from this crass idea of what dealer was. And so they invented this term, "gallerist."

MS. AYRES: What is your general – well, hmm. I wanted to talk a little bit about the financial arrangements with the artists you choose to show, but I'm not so sure how interesting that is. It's more of a question that probably needs to be on record and –

MS. FELSEN: Well, I can just say, you know, we have a 50-50 relationship with – regarding the sale of the artist's work. The gallery pays for publicity and advertising and photography, which, since I use Doug Parker, is astronomical. And we expect – let's see. Sometimes, if there's framing, the artists will go ahead and have them framed, or sometimes if the artist isn't able to do that, then we'll share the cost of framing. Fabrication costs are often added on to the top price, and then the artists get that at the top – off the top. And – but that doesn't come up with our artists very often.

MS. AYRES: And the percentage is usually 50-50 or 60-40 or –

MS. FELSEN: Well, it hasn't been 60-40 for years.

MS. AYRES: It's 50-50, huh?

MS. FELSEN: So it's 50-50.

MS. AYRES: Mm-hmm. Once you schedule an exhibition, who has the last say on what is shown and how, you or the artist? What if you disagree with the artist?

MS. FELSEN: Well, this doesn't happen very often, because I have such respect for the artists that I choose, that if there's a work that I'm not particularly crazy about, so what, you know? I think it's important that it be shown. If the artist wants it shown, let it be shown. And then the artist or I will come around to maybe realizing that it's not such a terrific piece or it is a terrific piece after all. I mean, it's not so terrible.

But I mean, I choose the artists that I choose because I have such respect for them, and I trust them. And hopefully they feel the same about me.

MS. AYRES: You seem to have been exceptionally loyal to your artists, allowing them to develop over time and even allowing them to make sudden shifts in their style, which is always challenging to collectors and viewers. This is particularly true of Tim Ebner, I think.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, Tim is the most dramatic case. He, it's curious – and who knows why that happened? But he had been showing with the Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery, and he was right out of school, and he was a big success. All the museums and collectors were buying his work. And it was the kind of work that wasn't interesting to me. I mean, I respected it and thought it was well done. It was very minimal and beautifully fabricated and – but the minimalists – that was over for me, and I was not interested in that. Ever since I'd opened the gallery, I was not interested in minimalism anymore.

But – so he came to me, and I thought – after Richard closed his gallery, and he said – or he was about to close – he said that he wanted to show with me, and I said great. And he started doing different things at this time. There were these small, round orbs, like discs, and individual pieces that were very beautiful.

And then he said something that – he decided that he didn't want to do that anymore and that Carol Vena had this studio, and she had this big canvas, and was he interested in working on it? And so he said he would do that. So he made this big painting on canvas. He said, "I haven't painted on canvas for a long time, and I want to see what I can do.

So this great big canvas he painted, and it was like images – they were abstract, but they were images of his discs floating through the surface. And then he started doing smaller paintings, and – but he wasn't – he was really exploring. What was he going to do? And he started doing figurative work, and it started looking space figures or animals or clowns and just bizarre-looking things, and not painted very well, by the way.

And he wanted to show these, and I said, "Okay. Let's show them." And – because, you know, I think it's important when an artist is developing, particularly – this was such a dramatic change – but when they're going through a transition, I think it's important that the work be out, so the artist can see it in a formal situation, so that the community can see it, and the artist can get some kind of an idea of what it is that he is doing, if anything.

So okay, that show was bizarre. And then we had another show, and it was still bizarre, but he started painting better. And it was – they were animals that were wearing clothes and hats and things. And with each subsequent show, the paintings got better and better and better. And then he ended up being a wildlife painter. And this was a transition of about 10 years. And so that's what he's doing right now. So you never know.

MS. AYRES: [Laughs.] Is it unusual for a commercial gallery to use guest curators? I'd like you first to talk about Michael Duncan's pattern and decoration exhibition at your gallery. That was a tremendously interesting show.

MS. FELSEN: No, I don't think it's unusual. I mean, I've done that for years. I know Meg Cranston curated a show for me in 1984 or something like that, called "Heterodoxy." And she had recent – well, maybe it had been three or four years since she graduated from Cal Arts and – or maybe it was a little later than that, but somewhere in the early or mid-80s. And Jim Shaw was in the show. John Boskovich was in the show and a number of artists of that generation. And out of the whole show, John was the artist – John Boskovich was the artist that I picked up to have a show at the gallery.

So then we had – I remember Mike Kelley came in one day, and he was telling me about Ralph Rugoff, who at that time was writing art criticism in the *LA Weekly*. And he said, you know, Ralph is teaching at Arts Center, and he's talking about this area of art called "patheticism." And he said, I think he has an idea for a show, and it might be a good thing for you to talk to him about it.

So I called Ralph, and sure enough, he had this idea for a show called "Just Pathetic." Well, and he wanted to do a little catalogue, and we did a little inexpensive catalogue for it. And he invited artists to be in the show – L.A. artists, New York artists, European artists. And it was a really land – [laughing] – a land-breaking record to go to the show, because people are still asking me about this show. In fact, the current issue of *Artforum*, talking about art of this particular period, they mention this particular show. And he coined this term "patheticism," which is certainly alive and well.

So over the years we've had different people curate shows. Michael Duncan did this Kim MacConnel exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum. He said that he thought it would be a great idea because so many people didn't know about the pattern and decoration movement or had forgotten about it, and to put Kim's work in context with what was going on at that time and artists who are still today working in the area of pattern and decoration – that if – some of the galleries at Bergamot would participate in a show that he would curate. And so many of us agreed to do that.

Shoshana Wayne Gallery had the L.A. – excuse me – had the New York version. We had the L.A. version. And let's see. Patricia Faure had – I forgot what she had – and Frank Lloyd – I forgot what he had, too. But it was primarily Shoshana and I had the L.A. and New York – and it was a really good show. And he did a very thoughtful presentation. And I think it helped people to learn about pattern and decoration.

MS. AYRES: I notice that Patrick Hogan was in that exhibition. Tell me how a dealer goes about handling an estate. Perhaps you could address your answer to the Patrick Hogan estate, which must be something of a labor of love.

MS. FELSEN: [Chuckling.] Yes. Well, I was approached by Louis Leithold who was one of the partners of the gallery, called the Tortue Gallery, that represented Patrick Hogan when he was alive. And he said, well, so I have this Patrick Hogan work, and I need someone to – I think we should get it out there and sell it and do something with it. And I said, well, what's the primary concern about this work?

And he said, well, the only family member, the only heir alive is his brother, Michael. And he said, maybe you should talk to him about it. So I talked to him about it. And I said, what would you really like to see most happen

to this work? And he said, that it be seen. So I said, well, in that case, how would it be if we made donations of this work to various museums in the area?

And he said, oh, would they be interested?

And I said, you bet they'd be interested.

So I said – because, you know, the idea of educating the public about the work of Patrick Hogan – it would be like starting anew with all of this. And it just seemed like a very difficult thing to do. And I thought that we'd be much better to just get it in the museum now.

And so that's what I did. I contacted every museum around. Every museum was more than happy to take one, two, even several works of his. There was only one museum that turned it down, and was the Phoenix Art Museum, because they said, why don't you give us a Jim Shaw instead? [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: I think there was also a problem in that the work was in storage, and when Tortue closed, Michael began getting bills from storage and was not in a position to take care of this work. And I think this happens more often than not with artists not as well-known as Patrick was. One can sometimes get calls from somebody to say, my aunt was a painter and went to – I don't know – Otis, and what can I do with all this work? She just died. This kind of sad situation.

MS. FELSEN: Right. Right.

MS. AYRES: But in Patrick's case, in Michael – the brother's case, this was an artist with such a reputation, at the time, and so beloved of the L.A. art community, being very sick –

MS. FELSEN: Exactly.

MS. AYRES: – and in a wheelchair and painting, at the end, either with directions to an assistant or holding a brush in his mouth; that he was somewhat legendary, and yet the work, for people who didn't know this, was always admired.

MS. FELSEN: Not only admired but extremely influential. He influenced Karen Carson. He influenced Roy Dowell. I mean, I can see it in the work. And so people were just so inspired by him, artists particularly.

MS. AYRES: So this was an unusual question of handling an estate, and generally you don't do that.

MS. FELSEN: No.

MS. AYRES: I mean, someone like Manny Silverman –

MS. FELSEN: Right. Right.

MS. AYRES: – it's part of his way of doing business, to handle an estate –

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: – but it's not part of your contemporary concern.

MS. FELSEN: No. No. Not yet, anyway. [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: I want to ask one more question about your seemingly lifelong attitude towards money, and I'm gathering the quotes for this question from the UCLA oral history interview, which I want to credit again for covering a great deal of the background.

From the beginning, you did not want to be a part of the selling end of Gemini. You were not worried about the financial fallout of getting a divorce. You did not, when working briefly for the Timothea Stewart Gallery, know anything about selling. You were not too concerned about the risks of starting your own gallery and not partial to wheeling and dealing. That is, you don't consider yourself aggressive.

I think you mentioned that one of the valuable aspects of working for, say, a museum, is that you didn't have to be involved with this at all. In fact, you were actually surprised – and, I suspect, hurt – when Mike Kelley and Lari Pittman were insistent and ultimately hard-nosed about money owed them. Yet you have survived successfully, too, for over two-and-a-half decades. Is there a contradiction here? Do you think your attitude about money is more suitable to another time? Have you changed? Have you grown over the years, as I think you probably have? You must have, to have survived for two-and-a-half – Is it a more competitive age today?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, it's certainly much more competitive now. The art world is a thousand times bigger than it was when I first began, and certainly in Los Angeles. So – but at the same time, there are more players in general. There are more artists. There are more collectors.

Actually, I'm contradicting myself, because when I say there are more artists, I have this idea that it – [END TAPE 3, SIDE A] – even though art schools are cranking out all these artists, you know, in huge amounts, I still think that there's the same number of really good artists that there ever was. I think the difference is now that we have to look at so many more to find those same number of artists.

MS. AYRES: And that same number would be as little as five and as much as 10 or 20? I mean, you can't –

MS. FELSEN: I don't know.

MS. AYRES: – but whatever it is, there's the same number –

MS. FELSEN: I think so.

MS. AYRES: – as when Rothko and Jackson Pollock –

MS. FELSEN: That's what I think.

MS. AYRES: – or Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg –

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Because artists can't help being artists. They can't help themselves. They have to be artists. And there is – they have no choice. So I think they are – the same ones are still there.

MS. AYRES: I think it would be a good idea now, after we've covered almost four decades of your experience, to talk a little bit about your background and your childhood.

For instance, your parents were Romanian Jews who settled first in Canada, then in Pasadena. You were the much youngest of three children and were born in Pasadena, California, on February 28th, 1934. There was little art museum background, except for the Huntington Library and Gardens. But you do remember interest in popular magazine articles on Duchamp and Dali and Pollock.

Were there particular childhood experiences that helped form a character drawn to facilitating the careers of artists or to collaborating with artists? For instance, you characterized yourself as "insecure but egocentric at the same time." What are the advantages and disadvantages of that combination?

MS. FELSEN: Well, oh, I think – I used to read a lot. I always read a lot in elementary school age and through junior high school. And I think in – I started becoming interested in theater and thinking that that might be an area that I might want to go into, not as a performer, but perhaps as a director or a producer or facilitator somehow. And I actually directed our senior class play, which was a musical. [Laughter.] And I can't tell you what the name of it was, but it was – anyway.

And then I belonged to these other groups, and we – I directed other plays. And I seemed to really enjoy that. I seemed to know how things should look. I seemed to know how things should act, even though I didn't know the first thing, really, professionally about acting. But I just seemed to know how things should look.

So – but you know, this was also a time when I was getting – in those days, you could get a driver's license at the age of 14. And so I was out a lot, you know, with my friends, carousing and hanging out at the drive-ins with the hotrodders and so forth. And that played a big part in my life.

But I also rode horses a lot, and that was a big part of my life between the ages of like 11 to 16. And I'm back to riding horses again, which is – with a 40-year lapse in between. So I'm having a wonderful time doing that.

So gee –

MS. AYRES: Well, you've also said that you – that, quote, "I'm not afraid of making a mistake." That sort of comment sounds grounded in your early life, or was it something you picked up later on?

MS. FELSEN: I don't know where that came from. I just knew that – I think maybe it came from my mother who was very forgiving. [Laughs] – I didn't – it wasn't absolutely essential that everything had to be done perfectly and that if something was not correct, it was alright, because she was loving anyway. So maybe that's where it came from.

MS. AYRES: Do you think that your parents were generally satisfied with their lives? What were their ambitions for themselves and for their children?

MS. FELSEN: I think their ambitions for themselves had a lot to do with, you know, making a living and coming to this country in the '20s, and then trying to get a foothold, and then the Depression comes, and they already had two children, and then of course I was born at the depth of the Depression, which did not make them happy, probably.

But then – and the war came along when I was in elementary school, and my father started making a lot of money, and they were much more comfortable. They started traveling a great deal, building a new house. And – but by the time they had the house built, I was already out of the house. So I missed that.

But – so I think they – they were very social. They had a lot of friends. In terms of their goals for their children, my father felt that it was important that my brother go to school, but for my sister and I, that didn't seem to be so important, and that all I needed to do was to get married and then he wouldn't have to worry about me anymore.

MS. AYRES: [Laughs.]

There have been at least two times in your life when you considered pursuing a degree at UCLA, but did not.

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. AYRES: The first time was in 1952, when you got married instead, to Vern Hinderer [ph] – married in 1952 and then divorced in 1959 and then – but you had three children in that marriage. The '50s were for you primarily a time of raising your three children. Would you talk a little bit about that period of your life? You were very young.

MS. FELSEN: Yes. Well, my oldest child was born deaf, which I didn't find out until he was 10 months old. And so a good part of my time was spent in his early education, learning to lip read. And then – actually, this was the John Tracy Clinic, where – Spencer Tracy's wife started this, named after her son. And it was actually for the purpose of teaching the children how to teach their – teaching – excuse me – teaching the parents how to teach their child.

And so he – Tony was doing well in school, and then he went on to elementary school and then – but by this time, I was already married the second time, to Sidney Felsen.

MS. AYRES: And that marriage happened in 1960, and you had your fourth child. You must have been really busy at home. Did you ever question your satisfaction? Did you think about working outside the home once the kids grew older? We're talking about the first half of the '60s, when you were still in your 20s, and before Gemini.

MS. FELSEN: No, it never occurred to me, because how could I possibly work outside of the home when I had four children? And – but I was thinking about Sid and thinking that, you know, here he was a practicing CPA, and here he had – he was an interesting guy and had a lot of interesting outlets, and art was one of them. And we had a joint interest in music. And I felt why – how can you do this? And he said, "Well, I think it's performing a valuable service." But he started – it got him to thinking about doing something else, and he started thinking about other things that he might be doing.

But in terms of me, there was just – it was not possible for me to think about doing anything with four children at home.

MS. AYRES: The '50s and early '60s were a period when Los Angeles was just beginning to come into its own as an arts center of potential great interest. How aware were you of, say, Ferus Gallery or Rauschenberg's exhibition of "Combines" at the Virginia Dwan Gallery in 1962, or the early exhibitions of Walter Hopps at the Pasadena Art Museum, and in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art moving to a new building on Wilshire Boulevard?

Again, I'm talking about the period before Gemini and before your own involvement with the Pasadena Art Museum.

MS. FELSEN: Well, I had not been to a gallery until I was married to Sid. And so we started going right away, of course. And so I so remember the Dwan Gallery very, very well. And I do remember the early days of Ferus and when Irving Blum took over and the Art Walks on Monday nights. And sure, I remember all that stuff and the Pasadena Art Museum. Sure.

MS. AYRES: In 1965 at LACMA, Maurice Tuchman organized an exhibition called "New York School, the First Generation: Paintings of the 1940s and 1950s," that presented all the important abstract expressionists. Did this exhibition seem like an introduction or a summing up?

The very next year, 1996, there was a Man Ray retrospective at LACMA –

MS. FELSEN: Nineteen-sixty-six.

MS. AYRES: Nineteen-sixty-six. Were you aware of the change from the high seriousness of abstract expressionist painting to the wit and irony of Pop Art and of what was then called Neo-Dada?

MS. FELSEN: Yes, I remember that – when the museum opened, I remember the show very well because up to this point, since I had never been to New York, I had never seen any of these outside of reproductions in books and magazines. And it was very exciting for me to see this work.

I got to know Man Ray and his wife, Juliet, because this was – it happened just right when we were beginning Gemini, and we invited Man Ray to come and do some project at Gemini. So that was quite wonderful, to meet an historical figure like Man Ray. And he was such a great storyteller. It was – he was a real interesting man.

MS. AYRES: I'm interested in Maurice's exhibition in 1965 of the New York school here in L.A. Nineteen-sixty-five is pretty late in the careers of these artists. Do you remember or do you have a sense of how it was received generally in Los Angeles?

MS. FELSEN: You know –

MS. AYRES: – as something new or something – it's become so much a part of history, it's impossible to –

MS. FELSEN: I just can't give an answer to that, I'm sorry to say. But I think at this point it was – you know, it was a done deal. And I think, you know, it was accepted.

MS. AYRES: Do you have anything you want to say about your upbringing that you think was of particular interest to – I mean, it's – looking back from now to then, it always seems a little odd to me, personally. I think I'm a different person, and yet I do recognize the thread that runs from childhood to now.

MS. FELSEN: I'm not sure. I just know, because I was considerably younger than my sister and brother – I was in elementary school, and my brother was off in the Navy during World War II, and my sister was married. So it was almost as if I was an only child, although I always felt close to my brother and sister, and still do to this day.

But actually, I think they had a strong influence on me. I was probably very independent, and it was almost as if – not almost as if – I was growing up in a different decade than they had grown up in. And I – things were changing, and attitudes about kids growing up – I remember my brother trying to explain to my mother, you know, why she was having difficulty in understanding me and the kinds of things that I wanted to do. He was trying to explain to my mother that times have changed, and this is a different world now, after World War II, than it was when he was growing up. So that was kind of helpful.

So – but I think it was this independence and this confidence that I always seemed to have. I always did well in school, and I – you know, I was always asked to do extra things because I could take charge of these things. So – I don't know where that came from.

MS. AYRES: So being a dealer or a gallerist might have been one of several ways your life could have gone. But it seems to be a particularly happy and right one for you. It's nice when you look back and say, you know – and not say, "I wish I had been a chemist," or "I wish I had been a director." I feel that you must be very satisfied with the choice you made.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah, I can't imagine doing anything else, actually.

MS. AYRES: The general focus of your gallery from the beginning was on Los Angeles artists and often on artists who weren't getting that much attention at the time. You seem to have wanted your gallery to be the place where out-of-towners came to see the newest and the best of L.A. artists. Did that work out for you? And was that function more urgent when you started your gallery in 1978 than it is today?

MS. FELSEN: There was an interesting thing that was helpful to me. In addition to being one of the few galleries that was doing this in L.A. at the time, Richard Armstrong was still in California at this time. He had been a curator at the La Jolla Museum. Richard curated a few exhibitions in California. Then he got a position as a curator at the Whitney Museum in New York.

Barbara Haskell, with whom I had worked at the Pasadena Art Museum, was also a curator at the Whitney Museum. So this is, I think, a lot of the way the art world works. I knew two curators at an important museum in New York that did a biennial exhibition. So naturally every year they would come to town, and they would – they were looking for artists to be in the biennial, and I had at least three or four every single year, for a number of years.

Well, Richard left, and then Barbara was moving back into the modernist period, and not dealing with the

biennial anymore. Through them, I had met Richard Marshall, and then he left the museum. And Lisa Phillips – I met her as well. But I don't know the curators there anymore, which is interesting to me, that – and this is a significant point, I think. It is really crucial if you are going to have these relationships. This is what – this is how your make these connections. And I don't know – it's a significant point.

MS. AYRES: During this conversation, we've talked about many of your colleagues. And I think it – I'd want to ask you now whom among your colleagues of your generation do you admire most and why?

MS. FELSEN: Of my generation. Different ones, for different reasons. I mean, Margo Leavin runs a very tight ship, and she is very confident – no, she isn't, actually, because I know her pretty well. [Laughs.] She gives the appearance of being confident in what she's doing, and she does things in a very professional manner.

Patricia Faure is the most charming and the most enjoyable person to be around. And she's a neighbor of mine, and we have a good relationship. And she has a particular direction of the kind of art that she likes to show, and she does it. But I think the quality about Patty that I admire the most is her social charm. I think she's – that's just a joy. She's just wonderful to be around.

Let's see. Who else do I admire of my – who else is in my generation?

MS. AYRES: Well, who else is there? [Laughter.] Who else is there? I'm thinking the same way –

MS. FELSEN: I don't know who else there is.

MS. AYRES: Maybe we – maybe I'll ask – there have been many generations of dealers since. Some have lasted, and then there are always new galleries opening, especially in Chinatown today. We also saw new galleries opening in areas near Bergamot Station before that area was developed.

Who have you admired or who do you have your eye on, your – of those newer generations of dealers?

MS. FELSEN: Well, the not quite so new, the boys that I really like a lot are the ACME boys, Randy [Sommer] and Bob [Gunderman]. They're just – I get along with them really well. And I like them as people. And that's really a nice thing for me.

I also like Richard Telles.

I know the Chinatown dealers less, so I can't probably – except for Roger Herman, of course, who I always enjoy talking to.

MS. AYRES: And he's not seriously a gallerist, but –

MS. FELSEN: No, but he's getting more serious, now that he is a director. So –

MS. AYRES: What would you say to a young woman or a young man who came to you and said, "Gee, this looks like an interesting job; I'd like to do this"?

MS. FELSEN: Mm-hmm. "How much money have you got?" [Laughs.]

MS. AYRES: That's the first thing you'd say.

MS. FELSEN: [Laughs.] Right!

MS. AYRES: And then?

MS. FELSEN: And then "Why do you want to do this" and so forth. "How much experience have you had doing this?" And "you better get some."

MS. AYRES: So the advice you would give is to?

MS. FELSEN: Work at a gallery, and either you must already have some money or you find some place to get it, because you'll need it.

MS. AYRES: You wouldn't suggest that he or she attend a curatorial studies program or a museum studies program and get an M.A. or even, I think, occasionally, a Ph.D. in this subject?

MS. FELSEN: Actually, I have suggested this. And what's happened is one person became an artist, and the other person is now working on her Ph.D. and is an art historian.

MS. AYRES: Is – but neither one of them –

MS. FELSEN: And neither one of them – and this is what happens.

MS. AYRES: Mm-hmm. Well, as it turned out, you never did get to UCLA.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: And you learned in a hands-on, make-it-up-as-I-go sort of school of experience.

MS. FELSEN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Were you ever sorry you missed formal academic studies?

MS. FELSEN: Oh, yes. Absolutely. To this day I'm sorry. Absolutely.

MS. AYRES: But you must do a lot of catch-up on your own.

MS. FELSEN: I –

MS. AYRES: We're talking about, I suppose, a formal approach.

MS. FELSEN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But I do miss it. I'm really sorry that I didn't. I really, really am sorry that I didn't.

MS. AYRES: But at the time, it was impossible. You were in the direction where you were heading –

MS. FELSEN: Yeah.

MS. AYRES: – and your life would have taken a different turn, perhaps, I mean –

MS. FELSEN: Right. But I listen to these things, you know. When your life does take a different turn, you go with it and don't fight it, and because there's something maybe interesting behind that door.

MS. AYRES: Well, Rosamund, I wish to thank you for being willing to construct a fascinating narrative of four decades of experience as an active participant in the Los Angeles art scene. And presumably I would want to add: Is there anything that you have to add?

MS. FELSEN: It's hard to know whether you've remembered everything that is worthwhile bringing up. You've helped me to do that. And it's been a pleasure.

MS. AYRES: Thank you, Rosamund.

This interview has been with Rosamund Felsen, founder of the Rosamund Felsen Gallery in Los Angeles. The interviewer is Anne Ayres. The interview took place at Rosamund Felsen's home in the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles on two consecutive days, October 10 and 11 of 2004.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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